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Feminist Aliens, Black Vampires, and Gay Witches: Creating a Critical Polis using SF Television in the College Composition Classroom

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**Feminist aliens, black vampires, and gay witches: Creating a critical polis
using SF television in the college composition classroom**

by

Dawn Eyestone

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: English (Rhetoric and Professional Communication)

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ABSTRACT

The ability to *critically* consume entertainment media is a necessary skill for an educated and functional society—a polis; however, contemporary college students are experienced consumers of pop culture but not necessarily critical ones. Since categories of identity (race, class, gender, sexual orientation, dis/ability, culture) are constructed, maintained, and reified through mainstream forces including, powerfully, the media, the ability to critique these forces is critical for an educated polis. Drawing on scholarship in critical pedagogy, cultural studies, and media literacy, this study uncovers the relative effectiveness of speculative fiction (SF) television as a pedagogical tool for developing critical thinking skills in college level English composition students. This study answers the question: To what extent does SF aid students in engaging in deeper critical thinking, especially about critical categories of identity, while simultaneously meeting the overall goals for college-level composition courses? The study reveals that SF television is especially useful to the goals of college communication courses, especially first-year composition courses, which specifically attempt to teach critical thinking. This occurs in part because SF creates a safe space for students to explore “strange new worlds” of difference in identity where usual tendencies to resist critique are ameliorated by the distance inherent in students’ orientation to the genre.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Problems and Gaps

As scholars in disciplines like rhetoric, communication, media, and cultural studies, we are no strangers to the notion that the ability to *critically* consume entertainment media is a necessary skill for an educated and functional society—a *polis*. For the ancient Greco-Roman pedagogues the notion of an educated polis was simpler, in part because the population was more homogeneous and the cultural expectations more prescriptive. But for contemporary educators the task is much more complicated; not only do issues of identity (race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, culture, religion, etc.) create differences unknown to classical rhetors, but also a seemingly endless supply of contemporary entertainment media saturates the culture and minds of the developing polis and compete for their attention.

In her 1994 text *Transforming Mind*, Gloria Gannaway notes that “helping people learn how to analytically and critically read the texts of their experience” is a central goal of critical pedagogy (20). She discusses television as one of those texts which is especially important to critically read and analyze since it is so ubiquitous within culture. While Gannaway’s discussion does not get into the details of specific television shows, she does point to an important medium instructors can use for critical pedagogy.

In the article “Teaching Television to Empower Students,” David B. Owen, Charles L. P. Silet, and Sarah E. Brown ask an interesting question that I find relevant: Our students are experienced consumers of television—how can we harness their expertise? Since our students are familiar with the medium, our task becomes easier; we can focus on more critical issues related to genre and difference instead of worrying about teaching them how to “read” the medium.

But while Owen et al. call students *experienced* consumers of television, our classroom experience proves they are not *critical* consumers. Roslyn Z. Weedman is concerned with that issue and with student resistance to critical goals in “Research in the Classroom: Mass Appeal: Pop Culture in the Composition Classroom.” She says one way to combat that resistance to critical thinking is by using popular cultural subjects that hold students’ interest while also asking them to look critically at those subjects. Weedman quotes Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux’s 1985 text *Education Under Siege*: “If writing is to become part of the critical [thinking] process, deconstruction of mass audience culture is the first priority” (qtd in Weedman 96). Certainly, students have access to this pervasive medium and using it as a tool for teaching critical thinking has a good deal to offer the composition classroom. But what would such a pedagogy look like? What genre or genres of television might be most effective for achieving the critical goals of a composition classroom? The study presented here uses the speculative fiction (SF) genre of television to achieve these critical goals.

SF is an important and underused genre of fiction in composition. Although SF has been acknowledged as useful by academics under certain circumstances, its pedagogical relevance has not been productively recognized for teaching critical thinking and composition at the college level.

Frequently and inaccurately conflated with science fiction, speculative fiction might be more appropriately called a “meta-genre” since it encompasses multiple genres, which all fit the criterion of speculative. In the article “Science Fiction: Serious Reading, Critical Reading,” Diane Zigo and Michael T. Moore provide a working definition and rationale for the use of the term SF as preferable to science fiction which works well for this project. They argue that “SF is an agreeably ambiguous term since it can also stand for speculative fiction, thereby opening the doors for a broader understanding of what this body of literature encompasses” (85). SF includes not only science fiction, but also fantasy, horror, mythology, superhero stories, and any number of other fantastic fictional elements like dreams or alternate histories. The meta-genre of SF is especially useful because it allows for fantastic elements from any number of other genres to be included within its borders. In that context, the dream sequence from what might otherwise be categorized as a drama can be considered and thus analyzed as speculative fiction.

For many decades, SF has been included in the literature classroom as a serious genre for study. I remember reading Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* in the eighth grade and Ursula LeGuin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness* in high school. In

college, as a fan of SF literature and as an English major, I gladly took a science fiction literature course where I was introduced to authors like Joanna Russ and Octavia Butler, who were concerned with issues of identity and representation. Unfortunately, the scholarship around SF and its usefulness as a critical cultural artifact for the classroom was limited to the literary genre only.

There was a trend in the late 1990s and early 2000s during which scholars analyzed various television shows for their useful representations of critical categories of identity in popular culture. Articles in scholarly journals like *Science Fiction Studies* and *The Journal of Popular Culture* were frequent hotspots of academic discourse on television and the SF genre on television in particular (e.g. Joyrich, Bernardi.) Especially notable to scholars concerned with contemporary cultural studies issues of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation were SF shows like *Star Trek*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and *Xena: Warrior Princess*. The spark of scholarship on SF shows was bright and brief as we examined television with a critical eye and then did nothing with it. This trend seemed to peak and then subside rapidly as scholars found themselves at a loss for where to take the critically interesting ideas they had identified in the television shows. Although scholarly interest in the television shows remains (as evidenced by the endless availability of articles on websites like *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies*,) the articles themselves merely repeat the same observations about Buffy, Xena, and aliens to no practical purpose beyond firing our imaginations, or as David Lavery observes “academic ‘scholarfans’ . . . part of Buffy’s cult audience,

imagining themselves, quite unprofessionally, in the story” (3). It seems we didn’t know what to do with Buffy after we analyzed her. Like academic stalkers, we followed the SF like a religion but never actually used it to any good purpose. SF television never made it to the classroom.

SF television’s absence from postsecondary English classrooms is notable for several reasons. The literary medium, which shares many key critical features with the televised one, has made it to the classroom as an artifact worthy of study. Additionally, much scholarship in the last few decades touts the importance of including new technologies and popular culture, including television, in the classroom (e.g. Giroux, Stack & Kelly, Gannaway.) Finally, televised SF has been critically examined by scholars in academia for its ability to present and critique important socio-political aspects of contemporary society, including those that are typically included as part of cultural studies. Why then, is SF television not being used as a pedagogical tool?

While SF television could be used in a variety of classroom settings, it is especially useful to the goals of college communication courses, and especially first-year composition courses, which specifically attempt to teach critical thinking. Students in such courses frequently lack the ability to see or acknowledge a world view that is different from their own and a major goal for the college composition classroom is to guide them to a broader understanding of the world around them. Instructors have some significant roadblocks to achieving this goal. This study addresses three major roadblocks:

1. Students are experienced consumers of pop culture but they are not critical consumers. In a culture of consumption, students don't "see" the visual and verbal messages that surround them daily as anything other than background. Students often believe they are immune to the goals of advertising and entertainment and don't examine more closely how their thinking is influenced by a culture of consumption.
2. Students erroneously equate the activity of criticism with rejection and derision. This tendency on the part of students to understand criticism as an automatically negative interpretation of a given text creates several barriers to helping students develop critical skills in analysis of texts, both visual and verbal (i.e. the WOVE curriculum used by ISUComm,) which are central outcomes to the college composition classroom. This misunderstanding of criticism can create an atmosphere of antagonism where students resist participating in the larger goals of the course because they have a personal stake in maintaining the status quo of their own culture and its artifacts.
3. Categories of identity are constructed, maintained, and reified through mainstream forces including, powerfully, the media. And while the contemporary *polis* is a diverse population, that diversity is not accurately reflected in mainstream media, and often those misleading representations are accepted at face value by students. Additionally, these students are still developing their personal identities and attempting to "find their places" within society, and the mainstream media helps construct these identities.

My solution to these problems and the major goal for this study is to challenge students to approach popular culture critically, with an eye for how identity is represented, without asking them to reject the media out of hand.

In her 1997 critical composition pedagogy text, *Turns of Thought*, Donna Qualley argues that “encounters with others contain the ingredients for individuals to undergo ‘the stranger experience,’ where they discover that their customary ways of making sense may not be sufficient for understanding their subjects or themselves” (139). Qualley is specifically addressing encounters with others in a real world context—students travelling and living with people of other races, classes, genders, etc. Such encounters aren’t practical in the classroom context, however, and I argue that such travelling can occur virtually with similar results. The genre of SF is especially suited to achieving numerous critical goals because it allows viewers to “explore strange new worlds” they would not otherwise be able to inhabit, while not asking them to permanently reject the integrity of their own identities and beliefs. Is the “world travelling” that happens when one enters a fictional world enough to trigger the critical reflexivity Qualley argues for? This study attempts to answer that question.

Goals for the Composition Classroom

Before any meaningful discussion of how SF television could benefit composition classroom pedagogy, it’s important to outline what the central goals of

such courses are. What do we want our students to take away from these courses? Why is it important to create a critical polis? How do theories in cultural studies and concepts of identity fit into courses seemingly focused solely on developing skills in effective communication?

Key Questions for the Study

This study will attempt to answer the following questions:

- To what extent does using television and film in the post-secondary composition classroom aid students in developing critical thinking around critical categories of identity, regardless of their relative subject positions and individual identities?
- How does the SF genre of television help achieve the goals of the post-secondary composition classroom?
- How does the instructor's relative subject position impact students' ability to access and interact with the messages in the media?
- Can students make critical connections between what they see as entertainment and what they experience in reality?
- How can we help students analyze television critically without asking them to abandon the inherent pleasure of its consumption?

Important Intersections in Existing Scholarship

In addition to answering these important questions, this study will demonstrate intersections between several key areas of existing scholarship that have not previously been tied together. These categories include:

- Critical Pedagogy/Literacy
- Connecting Critical Thinking to Cultural Studies and Categories of Identity
- Using Popular Culture/Media in the Classroom
- Identifying SF as Cultural Critique
- Contemporary Sophistry/Educating the Polis

The following chapters provide a comprehensive analysis of the theory and practice of a pedagogy of SF media as a tool for critical thinking about categories of identity. Chapter Two provides detailed descriptions of the connections between existing areas of scholarship with a comprehensive examination of the literature. Additionally, Chapter Two discusses some precedents of using television critically in the classroom, as well as detailing some important features of SF as a genre. Chapter Three details the methodology of the research study, site descriptions, and participant selection. Following that, Chapter Four presents the data collected over the course of four semesters, while Chapter Five analyzes those data in relation to relevant theory. Finally, Chapter Six explores the consequences of the analysis and examines the possibilities of future work stemming from this research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF SIGNIFICANT LITERATURE

Critical Pedagogy

This study is intended to uncover whether or not SF television is effective in teaching critical thinking skills as an effective part of a postmodern composition curriculum. The course and study were designed so that the basic principles of composition were incorporated alongside the critical thinking goals. For many critical composition scholars (Berlin, Shor, Giroux) these two goals should go hand-in-hand, despite the history of college composition being thought of by other disciplines as a “skills” course. James Berlin agrees with Henry Giroux’s assertion that “the work of education in a democratic society is to provide ‘critical literacy’” (Berlin 55). For Berlin, developing a pedagogy that imparts critical literacy—a term coined by Giroux—is complicated by the conflict about what higher education should be between economic and social institutions, cultural and material conditions, and subjective postmodern identities of students.

Berlin’s discussion of postmodernism in the context of composition pedagogy in his text *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures: Refiguring College English Studies* is especially appropriate in uncovering effective strategies for meeting these complex and conflicting goals. Berlin develops his concept of postmodernism from a number of thinkers commonly associated with the theory, notably Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jacques Derrida, and locates it within the

specific context of the college English classroom. This context is important because, as Berlin notes, “English departments are indeed moving in the direction of preparing students for work in a postmodern economy” (54) and adds that “colleges ought to offer a curriculum that places preparation for work within a comprehensive range of democratic educational concerns” (54). As composition instructors, it is our responsibility to meet the pragmatic needs of our students to be prepared for a future career that requires them to be strong communicators, while at the same time give them the tools to carefully critique the system of which they are going to be a part.

Berlin argues that “postmodern theory contains within it important challenges to our traditional notions of reading and writing that we ignore at our own peril” (72). He adds that one feature of postmodern theory is the recovery of rhetoric:

[P]ostmodern discussions have put rhetoric back on the agenda of virtually all of the human sciences. After all, the primacy of signifying practices in the formation of subject and society means that language can no longer be seen as the transparent conduit of transcendental truths. (72)

For the composition classroom, dispelling the myth of neutrality in language and the perception of composition as a skills-based course is essential because modernist curriculums have traditionally prepared students for the workforce without equipping them with the ability to critique that system.

Berlin observes that students from a modernist school “are more likely to acquire the abilities and dispositions that will enable them to become successful workers than the ability to make critical sense of this modern age of image and spectacle” (56). He adds that students receive almost no guidance from their education that aids them in negotiating and making sense of the postmodern culture that promotes the fulfilling of desire through media at every turn. He adds that “democracy will rise or fall on our ability to offer a critical response to these daily experiences” (57). Eliminating the myth of the classroom as a neutral space for skill-delivery is a necessary first step in creating a critical composition pedagogy that asks students to learn to think as they learn to write.

In almost all of Henry Giroux’s work in pedagogy, he argues that popular cultural artifacts, especially those with a strong entertainment component like films, television, and advertising are forms of pedagogy themselves. In the preface to his text *Disturbing Pleasures*, he discusses this belief as it impacts his work, and since the idea of popular culture as pedagogy is central to this study, Giroux is worth quoting at length:

For years, I believed that pedagogy was a discipline developed around the narrow imperatives of public schooling. And yet, my identity has been largely fashioned outside of schools. Films, books, journals, videos, and music in different and significant ways did more to shape my politics and life than did my formal education, which always seemed to be about somebody

else's dreams. Of course, any discourse about identity is always one contingent upon an analysis of history and power.

I no longer believe that pedagogy is a discipline. On the contrary, I have argued for the last few years that *pedagogy is about the creation of a public sphere*, one that brings people together in a variety of sites, to talk, exchange information, listen, feel their desires, and expand their capacities for joy, love, solidarity, and struggle. Though I do not wish to romanticize popular culture, it is precisely in its diverse spaces and spheres that most of the education that matters today is taking place on a global scale. (*emphasis added* x)

Giroux's comments here are important to this study for two reasons. First, he identifies in himself a previous belief about pedagogy—that it is limited to the transmission of skills in formal educational environments—which many other scholars and students still believe about what it means to be educated. Second, he highlights how popular culture functions as public pedagogy and why it's essential for “cultural workers” (Giroux's term for anyone attempting a critical pedagogy of pop culture) to engage with and critique artifacts of popular culture as critical teaching tools.

Central to this study is the definition of critical pedagogy as I understand it, which makes this same important distinction between a narrow understanding of how knowledge is transmitted in the classroom and the complexities of how people

actually learn about themselves and the world. Giroux's definition works well for my purpose:

[P]edagogy, refers to the production of and complex relationships among knowledge, texts, desire, and identity; it signals how questions of audience, voice, power, and evaluation actively work to construct particular relations between teachers and students, institutions and society, and classrooms and communities. (29-30)

Especially important is the connection between how knowledge and power are produced to create identities—both an individual's own identity and a collective understanding of identity in a public context. In defining critical pedagogy, Giroux adds that it “illuminates the relationships among knowledge, authority, and power. It draws attention to who has control over the conditions for the production of knowledge” (30). Put simply: Critical pedagogy examines how we know who we are, who others are, and who gets to say what's true and what's not.

In the first chapter of *Disturbing Pleasures*, Giroux uses the Disney Corporation, especially its adult-targeted films, to illustrate how popular culture shapes identity and truth. He argues that Disney functions as public pedagogy through its presentation of a constructed and restrictive view of history, gender, nationalism, sexuality, and the idea of choice in commodified culture. This happens in part, because the images are presented as fun and entertaining, rather than critical and serious. He argues that the hegemonic recreations of history, people, and society in these kinds of films (e.g. *Good Morning, Viet Nam*, *Pretty Woman*) are

swallowed by audiences as truth because, in part, they are in the guise of entertainment. Couched as “harmless” fun, the fictional identities and histories in these entertainment media become real memories for the audiences who consume them. Further, Giroux notes, because the entertainment presents itself not only as fun but as innocent, audiences aren’t challenged to consider alternatives that might actually exist (30-32). Even when individual experiences and identities don’t match the “fun” representations, the entertaining alternative is accepted while the alternative possibilities lie dormant. A key goal for critical pedagogy is to awaken this dormant knowledge and challenge the uncritical acceptance of the constructed view of people, politics, and culture as it is presented in entertainment media.

Politics and the Polis

As I thought about how to best explain why I’ve chosen to think of my students in this study as a polis, I reviewed Amy Lee’s text *Composing Critical Pedagogies: Teaching Writing as Revision*. In the chapter “Politics and Pedagogies” she identifies an issue I have also noted in my classroom, one that stands at the heart of my goals for teaching. Lee says her goals for teaching include conveying to her students that:

[P]eople who live comfortable lives in relation to normative discourses of sexuality and race, who occupy the privileged economic situation necessary for material and social comfort, have the luxury of perceiving action as a

choice. What [my students do] not seem to recognize, or at least acknowledge, is that these cultural and economic systems also function largely to ensure [their] own privilege. (29)

Just as Lee describes here, one of the most important goals for my teaching is to help my students recognize their own privileged positions in society. For most, if not all of my students, their privilege extends to the basic fact that they do not have to know or acknowledge the privilege to benefit from it. It is and always has been the burden of the marginalized group to enact change. In *Epistemology of the Closet* Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick observes exactly that:

If ignorance is not—as it evidently is not—a single Manichaeian, aboriginal maw of darkness from which the heroics of human cognition can occasionally wrestle facts, insights, freedoms, progress, perhaps there exists instead a plethora of *ignorances*, and we may begin to ask questions about the labor, erotics, and economics of their human production and distribution. Insofar as ignorance is ignorance *of* a knowledge—a knowledge that may itself, it goes without saying, be seen as either true or false under some other regime of truth—these ignorances, far from being originary dark, are produced by and correspond to particular knowledges and circulate as part of particular regimes of truth. (8)

It's clear here that Sedgwick challenges not privileged knowledge, but the privilege of ignorance. She illustrates her point with the example of the meeting of U.S. President Reagan and French President Mitterrand. Mitterrand spoke English but

Reagan did not speak French. Because of this, Reagan's ignorance was privileged. He had no knowledge of French and had no need of the knowledge. The responsibility of successfully communicating was completely on Mitterrand's shoulders. Reagan had only to speak "naturally" while Mitterrand had to communicate in a foreign tongue (4). Reagan did not know what he did not know and had no need, no reason, to know.

One of the best examples of this in a college composition classroom setting is the study documented in "'Always a Shadow of Hope': Heteronormative Binaries in an Online Discussion of Sexuality and Sexual Orientation" by Heidi McKee. In it, she reflects upon the discussion of sexuality and sexual orientation by students on a multi-college online discussion forum. She explores how, despite students' tendencies to speak and respond from heteronormative positions and binary relationships, it would be useful for students to expand their understanding of complex issues. Unfortunately, the online discussion reinforces rather than challenges binaries, and makes the marginalized students responsible for the work.

McKee provides some background information early in the study about both the inter-college online forum project and her own pedagogical interest in sexual orientation. Part of her interest and concern stems from her own marginalized status as a lesbian and in finding ways to engage students in conversations about subjects that are difficult to discuss face to face.

Her initial purpose in conducting the study was to answer whether or not online asynchronous discussions can "foster thoughtful and deliberative dialogues

about complex social and political issues” (316). Fairly early on, however, McKee becomes concerned that the students’ discussions have become “dominant,” reinforcing rather than challenging heteronormative thinking by ignoring the nuances of gay rights in favor of a focus on binaries: natural or not, gay or straight, etc. (317). Since she is neither generating nor participating in the online threads, she is in a position to simply observe the conversation between the students unfold. Eventually, McKee discovers that although she is initially concerned about those binary conventions, she concludes that those “stale conventions” (321) of inquiry regarding sexuality issues—heteronormative viewpoints and binary categorization—contribute to “movement in thinking” (317) for some students. Her analysis of students’ shifts in thinking seems to be her most useful insight emerging from the study. In discussing this shift in thinking, she invokes the term “movement” as a way to discuss students’ thinking, adapted from James Bohman’s work on public deliberation.

McKee also draws upon the scholarship of Alexander, Butler, Kopelson, and Malinowitz who discuss issues related to the reinforcement of heteronormativity (317) in similar classroom contexts. She also notes some previous online discussions of sexuality and her concerns about the potential for violence and “unproductive conflict” (319). She hopes the forum will avoid the level of strife displayed in earlier forums without giving in to silence on the issue. Much of the earlier work seemed to reveal negative and undesired responses and McKee hopes for a more positive one.

McKee borrows the concept of the “zone of proximal development” from Lev Vygotsky as a way to analyze student movement—that is, how far can student thinking actually change on a topic. She also uses Donna Qualley’s work in critical pedagogy to further enhance her analysis of how students understand and respond to each other on the forum and how they negotiate critical and complex issues (322).

The methodology for the study is pretty straightforward. McKee analyzes the text of the online discussion and interviews students involved in the exchange, getting their opinions on what took place, as well as uncovering what was memorable or useful. McKee includes eleven students in her analysis, six of whom she interviews in person and one who she interviews via email. One of the students—Jamie—was openly gay. Five of the interviewed students were also enrolled in her first-year composition (FYC) class. Her analysis includes data from various points in the online thread’s timeline as well as comments about what later appeared in some students’ related website assignments.

Although her methodology was straightforward, her relationship with the respondents was more complex. The most notable issue in the relationship between researcher and respondents was the fact that all of the students were aware of McKee’s status as an out lesbian except for one notable exception—Kevin—who was absent when she explicitly came out to her class and did not put two and two together from some of her other discussions. Interestingly, Kevin was also the most outspoken participant on the “unnaturalness” of homosexuality. His

level of unawareness seemed to actually provide a more realistic and representative interaction between students on the forum, especially between Kevin and Jamie.

In fact, McKee's disclosure of her own marginalized position may have actually been detrimental to the research since students may not have been comfortable expressing any negative views about homosexuality knowing they were being evaluated by a lesbian. Given that Karen Kopelson is one of the sources McKee uses for her theoretical framework, I found it odd that she did not employ the "performative neutrality" that guides Kopelson's pedagogy. Such an approach, in which the instructor essentially pretends to be neutral to polarizing or politicized topics, might have provided a safer atmosphere for the students and produced a more authentic discussion. McKee's distance from the research may not have been distant enough. I discuss using performative neutrality in detail during the methodology section in Chapter Three.

Additionally, aside from the mention of the website assignment, McKee does not provide much information on the interaction occurring within her face-to-face classroom between the students also participating in the online discussion. Such information could have given the study some additional contextual perspective. For example, was McKee discussing the forum in class? Were the students' face-to-face discussions related to or enhanced by the online forum? Were outspoken students on the forum the same as those in the face-to-face discussions? Some of this context

would have been helpful in understanding the extent of movement in thinking occurring for the students.

Ironically, given McKee's goals for the forum, the forum was the least beneficial and the most frustrating for the one gay student, Jamie. He spends most of his commenting time trying with limited success to persuade Kevin to see the other side of the issue. In fact, Kevin is moved only by Sarah's scientific arguments. While Jamie does succeed in providing fodder for Sarah's and other students' arguments, as well as providing a dissident voice to contradict the heteronormative assumptions, he does not experience any kind of "movement" from the interactions and the other students don't seem to catch on to what he is trying to say. While perhaps Jamie's "movement" on this topic isn't necessary, it does seem clear that he isn't benefiting from this setting either. Of course, the issue then becomes: how do students inhabiting marginalized positions make use of discussions that reinforce their othered status? McKee decides that the discourse is useful, but only to "normal" students. Jamie still had to do a lot of work to achieve the discussion's "usefulness" for his classmates. Although McKee claims students like Kevin experienced movement, they don't seem to experience movement away from the binaries, simply movement from one side of the issue to the other. McKee even borrows from Donna Qualley, who is concerned with "people in marginalized, oppressed positions" (322) but she invokes this concept, not in relation to Jamie's position but to everyone else's. The lack of focus on the marginalized position is an

oversight that problematizes the research, especially given her own marginalized status. Where does *Jamie's* learning fit into this scheme?

Additionally, McKee spends a great deal of her analysis on Kevin's change in position on the "naturalness" of homosexuality, a change connected to his lack of religious views and a belief in science. The study seemed to lack additional strong data to confirm that the kind of movement Kevin experiences could be expected from a majority of students. In fact, students such as Sarah don't seem to display any movement; rather, they maintain a fairly heteronormative position, despite their being supportive of gays in general. Given the open-ended format of the online discussion, perhaps there was little McKee could do about how students chose to examine the topic; however, a more focused project might provide specific questions that could direct the conversation differently, perhaps even ask students to role-play or consider multiple perspectives beyond an us-them paradigm.

McKee's conclusions about the extent of student movement is based largely on Kevin's movement alone. Did the more moderate-thinking students experience movement? Students like Sarah and Susan came to the discussion gay-friendly but still situated in dominant binary understanding and McKee does little to explain how these students experienced movement in thinking. What stands out for Sarah two months later is not how her thinking changed, but how Kevin's did (331). The only movement McKee documents in the online forum is the change in Kevin's position from one side of a binary to the other. Although McKee's research methods and theoretic framework were sound, her own subject position within the project

as well as her desire to make the work useful distort her results. Her analysis of the usefulness of “stale thinking” (317) is overstated and does, in fact, have the effect of reinforcing binaries. Kevin’s change of heart is cold comfort to the essentialized position Jamie is forced to continue to inhabit for the benefit of everyone else.

To translate the failings of McKee’s study and the point of Sedgwick’s theories to a generic classroom, consider the example of a gay student: Knowledge of identity becomes the burden of the marginalized student and ignorance the privilege of the rest of the class. In fact, knowledge of this student’s identity in some cases could be dangerous. For this student, keeping this knowledge secret is important, not only for critical issues of physical and emotional safety but basic day-to-day communication. Success in the classroom depends upon the student’s ability to speak, act, interpret, or “be” in a way that appears “normal” without corrupting others’ privileged ignorance by articulating what it is they do not know. These examples stretch beyond such categories of identity as sexuality and race to include people who fail to meet all of the criteria for “unmarked” privilege.

Destabilizing this unmarked privilege is some of what I hope to accomplish in my classroom. This unhinging would result in a redistribution of power. In the classroom (and eventually the workplace), communication becomes an even more critical skill since nothing can be known without explicit articulation—nothing is unmarked. If I am gay (or undocumented, intersexed, biracial, impoverished, disabled, Muslim, unattractive, obese, single, etc. etc.), I am marked. The unspoken assumption—the unmarked—is that I am documented, straight, male, white,

Christian, etc. Part of unhinging privilege relies on a deconstruction of these binaries which mark one as *the other*.

Since the majority of students in my classrooms are members of mainstream identities, finding a means of helping them recognize and destabilize binary understanding and privilege has become a top priority. The motivation for this is two-fold: First, students in the 18- to 20-something age group (which describes most students in my classrooms) are still developing their sense of self and identity, and second, these students will shortly wield a great deal of power and privilege in society, whether or not they know and acknowledge it. The classroom, for these reasons, is a political space, and students are the polis.

Thinking of the classroom as a political space and students as a polis are hardly new ideas. The ancient Greek instruction of rhetoric included politics at its core. Centuries later, critical pedagogy scholars (e.g., Giroux, Shor) concern themselves with public pedagogy, while feminist scholars (e.g. C. Miller, Blyler) make calls for politics in communication studies. Creating a critical contemporary polis, it seems, is on our collective minds. In developing a means of best teaching the issues I identified as critical, I found neo-sophistic methods well-suited to my goals. A number of scholars working in rhetoric and cultural studies have borrowed from the Greek sophists and adapted their concepts to modern critical pedagogy.

Berlin argues that “education exists to provide intelligent articulate, and responsible citizens who understand their obligation and their right to insist that economic, social, and political power be exerted in the best interests of the

community” (55). His definition of education here echoes very clearly what the classical Sophists said of education. Like those early Greeks and Romans, challenging the polis—the citizens responsible for the continued functioning of society—to be critical thinkers is key not only a functional society but to a just and democratic one. As noted earlier, Berlin connects this critical education with the recovery of rhetoric.

In “The Polis as Rhetorical Community,” Carolyn Miller argues that “The polis is a rhetorical community, then, because...it is the site of political debate between citizens, a locus of self-defining communal action. Because there are many citizens, there are differences; because there is one polis, they must confront those differences” (239). She adds that “the polis is an important ideological construction both for the Greeks and for their modern interpreters. We can thus understand the polis as a discursive projection, a set of assumptions implicit in any argument; it is the community invoked” (240). Challenging implicit assumptions is part of this project. Miller also reminds us that a significant goal for Sophistic educators, usually *others* themselves, was “to conceptualize human affairs and to explore questions involving ethics, politics, and rhetoric” (224). These three concepts are central to my composition courses. Hand-in-hand with those are notions of identity, both for the individual and the group.

In her article “The Politics of Interpretation” Gayatri Spivak discusses her concerns with group identity in the context of a contemporary polis or community:

Ideology in action is what a group takes to be natural and self-evident, that of which the group, as a group, must deny any historical sedimentation. It is both the condition and the effect of the constitution of the subject (of ideology) as freely willing and consciously choosing in a world that is seen as background. In turn, the subject(s) of ideology are the conditions and effects of the self-identity of the group as a group. It is impossible, of course, to mark off a group as an entity without sharing complicity with its ideological definition. (259)

Do students see the fictional worlds presented on television as “natural and self-evident” as Spivak might say? Do they believe that the people they see represented are how real people look, act, and think? Do their own (usually) mainstream identities keep them from recognizing the fiction in the fiction? These are questions I see being answered very clearly when I look at their writing. I want them to examine the “background” and make conscious choices about previously unquestioned details.

Let me relate an event which transpired at a session occurring at a recent year’s Convention on College Composition and Communication. The session, an homage to the late Eve Sedgwick, focused, in part on ideas of queerness. One presenter asked several times in reference to specific descriptions, “Is that queer?” Later, another presenter invited audience members to respond to writing prompts, including one that asked “How are you queer?” Another, in reference to Plato’s Phaedrus, asked “How do you flirt with students?”

Within a queer community, dissent exists by definition since the queer intentionally resists any pejorative notions of definitions that could create a community specifically definable as queer. However, at this particular workshop a sort of “ad hoc” queer community came together for the purpose of honoring Sedgwick.

In response to the Phaedrus question, I related a personal account of how I sometimes release tension in the classroom surrounding my physical “performative” body by inviting students to critique my hair or clothes. I am not inviting students to “view” me as a specimen of otherness, to find me nonthreatening or perhaps even comical in a way that would make their own “normalness” somehow okay again in the face of queerness. I don’t believe I am somehow representative of queers everywhere or that such a personal representation of queerness could be fixed in such a way. I neither invite students to trivialize difference nor do I offer them any specific version of self that they could easily place in a box. The invitation to comment about me is rooted in a pedagogy of performance that is always both queer and not queer, gay, straight, ambiguous, and confusing. I intentionally spike up my hair—by doing so I am inviting others to look. Why else would I do it? By verbalizing the invitation, I point to the work that I am doing, with gender or with whatever else I am talking about specifically, like pointing out my ridiculous combination of a flannel shirt and suit jacket and inviting students to explain what “cool” is since I “obviously need a lot of help” so I can use it as a jumping off place for a discussion of consumerism.

Helping students to feel comfortable with me as an individual, even a queer individual, however variously that manifests from day to day, does not mean that I try to make them comfortable with normalcy or that I find no value in discomfort. In fact, I agree with the presenter who said that discomfort with queerness can be valuable. But I'm also convinced that if they aren't comfortable with talking to me about the discomfort, I can't get them to take the next step to the more important critical work that I have set out for them. And frankly, they're going to talk about my hair one way or another so it might as well be useful to the goals I have for them in the first place.

This performative pedagogy is directly inspired by Karen Kopelson's work. Kopelson's article, "Rhetoric on the Edge of Cunning: Or, the Performance of Neutrality (Re)Considered as a Composition Pedagogy for Student Resistance," is a fascinating exploration of performative pedagogy in action. I found this article very personally intriguing as it addresses a conundrum I have struggled with personally in my own classroom: How do I get students to engage with topics of difference associated with race, class, gender, sexuality, etc. without alienating them through my own political agenda, or worse, my own marginalized position? Kopelson's answer to this dilemma is to employ the classical concept of *mêtis* in modern teaching. Her *technê mêtis* can be defined simply as a strategy of employing cunning, tricks, deception, and disguise to enable one to adapt to the situation and achieve the goal.

The first fifteen pages of her article address the problem of non-neutrality in the classroom and I wish to skip over that material and instead focus on the concept of *technê mêtis*, which she explores in depth in the second half of the article. For her this concept is derivative of the work of Marcel Detienne and Jean Pierre Vernant. Their book *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society* is Kopelson's primary source for *mêtis* in this context and she says it is important to note that this perspective on *mêtis* is not universal.

Essentially, Kopelson argues that modern instructors, especially those who are members of "othered" groups, can't effectively teach students about alternative perspectives from their own othered position. Moreover, students who are already resistant to the coursework (her example being first-year composition students) expect the English classroom to be a neutral space where "technical" information is transmitted and are resentful of any attempt on the part of the instructor to compromise that neutrality, especially if that attempt seems motivated by personal issues on the part of the instructor. By adopting a false neutrality, she argues, instructors can circumvent the problem and lead students to the original goal of examining alternative perspectives.

Performative neutrality, her term for the modern application of *mêtis*, is an act. She is very clear about that with her use of language, including the word "cunning" in her essay's title and phrases like "sly design" (130). She even says critical pedagogues "may simply need to be sneakier" (121) in their teaching performances. Further, she finds it curious that the concept of *mêtis* has been

marginalized from mainstream teaching strategies, especially considering that related concepts such as *kairos* and *technê* are successfully applied. She links this omission to the Platonic quashing of the Sophists and their use of rhetoric to “beguile” the listener. In fact, she goes so far as to suggest that “the obliteration of *mêtis* is thus fundamentally related to, if not one and the same with, the denunciation of rhetoric” (133). Like Plato condemning Gorgias, modern thought has condemned *mêtis* for its verbal trickery that lacks “measureable” knowledge (133). The modern denunciation of *mêtis* is also traceable to the modern tendency to privilege authenticity over dramatic methods.

Kopelson notes that the privileging of authenticity is tied to the denigration of rhetoric in the Western tradition, which started with Plato. However, with the help of some feminist theory Kopelson argues that the rejection of the so-called authentic self is also the rejection of a continued subordinate position within society. She says employing performative neutrality in the classroom represents “the honest desire and honest effort. . . to keep students open, keep students learning, keep students open *to* learning, so they may engage with rather than shut out difference” (135). Ultimately, artifice is goal-oriented and useful in the long term and in its artificialness, is ideologically true to its own ends.

One requirement of *mêtis* that Kopelson catalogues is the necessity of tossing out pure theory. She paraphrases famed feminist theorist Gayatri Spivak’s notion that we must “contaminate” pure theory “in order to engage in socially relevant work” (137). The distinction between theory and practice is a crucial

element of performative neutrality. A strategy is not theoretical—it must be timely, *kairotic*—adapting itself to the needs of the particular audience at the particular moment. Kopelson reminds us that rhetoric has always attempted to turn the audience favorably towards the speaker’s position.

Kopelson concludes her argument with an examination of some criticisms of her strategies, especially the criticism that pretending to be neutral or not a member of that “other” group may silence the very differences we are attempting to voice. She argues that while it is important that other voices speak, it is even more important that someone might actually be listening to those voices. She says that in focusing on the politics, “we have mystified and finally lost sight of both rhetorical principles and rhetorical resources” (141) which allow us to adjust to context. Reviving *mêtis* for the postmodern age is one of those lost resources.

Christy Friend examines another useful classical resource in her article, “Pirates, Seducers, Wronged Heirs, Poison Cups, Cruel Husbands, and Other Calamities: The Roman School Declamations and Critical Pedagogy.” In it she explores the classical model of the Roman declamations as a way to inform and perhaps justify modern pedagogical approaches that ask students to critique and resist dominant cultural ideologies.

Friend begins her study by defining the pedagogical trend toward teaching against mainstream ideology, which she dubs “critical teaching,” and then by listing some pros and cons of the trend. She says critical teaching asks students to examine texts from alternative perspectives, debate difficult issues in class, and critically

question mainstream beliefs (300). She cites several authors/theorists who support this pedagogical trend and says critical teaching has “lofty goals” (300).

She summarizes these goals by paraphrasing some of its advocates who assert that “writing instructors have an obligation to cultivate in students an appreciation for progressive political values, a sensitivity to injustice, and an ability to debate divisive issues” and adds that scholars should reject the notion that the classroom is an ideologically neutral space (300). Friend is concerned with the danger in this approach, which is that the instructor’s politics will alienate rather than instruct the students.

In addition, critics of critical teaching cite issues of dogma, political agendas, and the emphasis of conflict over craft. They go on to suggest that such teaching methods lack adequate instructor oversight and turn the classroom into a space of hostility rather than safety that leads to argumentation with no real world application (301). Friend then outlines several critical questions she hopes to answer in the article that specifically address the critics’ concerns. Her three questions boil down to the following concerns about critical teaching: Is it appropriate, is it ethical, and is it practical?

To answer these questions, Friend turns to the model of the Roman school declamations, especially as catalogued by Quintilian in *Institutio Oratoria*. Through her descriptions, she demonstrates the similarities between the classical model of declamations and the modern critical teaching method. She further argues that rhetoric schools used declamation as a standard teaching method intended “to train

students to someday speak in the law courts and the political forum” (303). The declamation method, she notes, was specifically designed to have real-world applications.

Of special interest to Friend in relationship to modern pedagogy is the element of declamation instruction called *controversiae*. As contrasted with *suasoriae*, where students deliberated on general courses of action usually related to historical events, *controversiae* asked students to prosecute and defend hypothetical legal cases relating to contemporary judicial principles. She says the interest in *controversiae* for modern instructors is “their concern with ethical and political conflict” (303). The method had students argue the various positions in a case, often positions contrary to their own. This style of debate was taught through models of the instructor, often with the instructor selecting the weaker position as a way of demonstrating how success could be achieved. The model put forth by the instructor did not suggest that the instructor was advocating for a particular political position, rather, was demonstrating for the students how to construct a successful argument.

Friend traces a number of specific examples from classical texts of types of cases debated and notes that the importance of this type of educational debate was its emphasis on discovering and applying general moral principles to specific cases, preparing students for effective public discourse later in life. She makes an important distinction between the specialized legal training some students might

later receive and the general skills needed for all future “citizen orators” (304). This type of instruction was considered necessary for all students, not just a select few.

Defining who “all students” in the Roman school are becomes important to Friend’s analysis. She explains the relatively small percentage of the population in ancient times that would have attended such a school (wealthy males of a certain class) and points out that the types of cases debated directly related to the people who were debating them. Advocating for women or slaves was common since such groups could not argue for themselves. Friend points out that “the fact that so many of the declamations required students to practice advocating for women suggests a recognition of these issues’ relevance and currency” (305). Clearly, the status of disenfranchised groups was important to the development of critical thinking skills necessary to classical education. However, this recognition of the limitations of a judicial system favoring male supremacy also highlights a serious flaw in the educational practice; the students themselves were complicit in the system. Giving a voice to the concerns and legal problems faced by the disenfranchised groups is the dominant group who maintains power over the groups they are advocating for.

The danger of this type of complicity for modern instruction is that voiceless groups continue to be just that. Friend cautions that “while attempting to identify with and speak to the concerns of other groups may foster political insight...assuming that such speech can replace the voices of actual members of those groups perpetuates injustice” (316). She concludes that for the ancients, the declamations did not promote social change but instead prepared them for success

within the existing socio-political structure. She notes that the declamations did not affect social change and did not lead students to appreciate the injustice of their society but, she says “*controversiae* provided a space wherein such critique was *possible*” (312, emphasis original).

Friend concludes that the declamations contain numerous practices useful to modern pedagogy, including a focus on ethics and political conflict, concern with legal rights of disenfranchised groups, emphasis on examining arguments from multiple perspectives, and the instructor’s modeling of alternate perspectives. While these practices are useful to modern educators, Friend has noted some failings in the classical model and suggests that modern curricula must pick and choose the classical elements best suited to modern needs. Such pedagogy, she says, “grounded in controversy and conflict, one that challenges students to embrace unfamiliar perspectives and encourages teachers to promote a nonmainstream political agenda, can produce rich pedagogical benefits” (317). While the classical model can’t address the needs of modern educators and students wholesale, it can provide a theoretical framework from which an effective methodology can be developed.

Both Friend and Kopelson focus on the idea of neutrality or lack thereof. One of Kopelson’s concerns with non-neutrality is that students will reject alternative presentations to mainstream values simply on the basis of the instructor’s assumed political agenda (Kopelson 117). Friend is focused more with how that neutrality is simply nonexistent in the classroom. For the Roman school method, neutrality

didn't exist since the instructors and the students were both complicit in the dominant system. In the more diverse modern classrooms that Kopelson examines, the socio-political stance of the instructor may not mirror that of the majority of students, a situation that creates difficulties in the best way to approach instruction of alternative viewpoints.

Both of these articles are of interest to me in how the classical models can be combined to arrive at a working solution. Friend outlines how the Roman school instructor would have argued the weaker (read: othered) position as a model for his students. This suggests that the instructor was practicing *mêtis* as Kopelson outlines; he was *performing* his instruction from a position that, though likely different from his own, was genuinely enacted without judgment of the position for the students' benefit. Such a performance is the other side of the coin of Kopelson's postmodern "fake" neutrality. For the students' benefit, she suggests enacting an apolitical position with the full knowledge that the instructor is anything but apolitical and neutral. Taking on an opposing position can generate credibility in the eyes of the students.

Credibility has been a buzz word for success in my teaching. Having credibility in the classroom goes a long way in getting the students to "buy what I'm selling." A simple example of this is when I was teaching my first-year composition students how to create a brochure. My credibility shot sky-high when I revealed to them that I had worked professionally in marketing and showed them one of my professionally printed marketing brochures. The problem with this example,

however, is that brochure creation is a *technical* skill and is politically neutral, at least on the surface; Longaker, no doubt could debate its underlying political implications. When my students are wrestling with more complex problems relating to socio-political ideologies, personal revelations are not always as useful in generating credibility.

In a previous summer session, I taught a section of English 250. This was a very small, very diverse section and presented some of its own challenges. I had a total of twelve (regularly attending) students, five of whom were non-native English speakers from non-Western cultures. I had three non-white Americans, and one gay student. In addition to that I had one active duty military student and the gay student was also ex-military. Add to that an outspoken single mom who supported John McCain (and gay rights!) and you had the makings of quite a debate.

Announcing to the class that I was gay, a Democrat, and a member of the military didn't seem to be the best way to gain credibility. It was certainly going to alienate some and compromise my authority with others. It was difficult for me to remain completely neutral and in fact my support for Barack Obama was pretty overt. I'm not sure how well I did with this group since some of the course evaluation feedback I got said that I was biased towards certain political views and graded students more harshly who didn't agree with my position. While I'm fairly certain I graded on the basis of performance, this feedback still concerns me and I want to find more effective ways of teaching to everyone who takes a chair in one of my classrooms. Kopelson's performative neutrality suggests a better way for me

and one that is, frankly, easier than outing myself on the first day of class, as has been suggested by other theorists I've read in the past. Kopelson's invocation of Gayatri Spivak echoes my feeling: that we must throw out theoretical purity "in order to engage in socially relevant work" (137). For me, the theories are interesting, but of much more concern is what I can actually *do* in the classroom. Of all the practical teaching methods I have read, Kopelson's appropriation of *mêtis* resonates most strongly with me personally. I can take off my combat boots for an hour, put on a business suit and some mascara, and pretend to be neutral.

The preceding discussion of performativity and neutrality in the classroom makes mention of students' resistance to critical ideas and their position as members of the dominant group, but only in brief. In his essay, "Beyond Ethics: Notes Toward a Historical Materialist Paideia in the Professional Writing Classroom," Mark Longaker examines the students' positions directly. In his article, he grafts the very old concept of *paideia* onto a fairly new manifestation of the rhetorical discipline: professional communication. He also (in obvious Marxist fashion) asserts the dangers of attempting to transmit ethical imperatives to students without considering the material circumstances of those students. Longaker defines *paideia* as "a pedagogical tradition designed to transmit communal ideals to the ruling class through education in, among other things, rhetoric" and included the teaching of "ideals of virtue... [and]... good behavior to privileged young students learning to be active political citizens" (80). This

definition is helpful since it provides a framework for thinking about who our students are and what we as instructors are teaching them.

Longaker recognizes that students belong to a particular class structure, which informs their learning and makes them complicit in the socio-political structure. He also argues that students in the university, whether currently members of the dominant economic class or not, are, through the process of educating themselves, moving towards the dominant class. Essentially, they want the economic and political advantages that come from advanced education and “as aspirant members of a socioeconomic class, might resist an ethic that is not in line with the economic imperatives of their moment or their professional aspirations” (89). To attempt to provide these students with a generic ethical education that assumes, as Plato might have, that they are “blank slates,” undermines the very meaning of *paideia*.

It should be noted that Longaker defines both the ancient Greek meaning of *paideia* and his own application of the term for his article. He says the Greeks’ pedagogical tradition was to transmit ideas of virtue, proper citizenship, and good behavior to students of the ruling class through rhetoric and public deliberation. His application of the term diverges in that he “use[s] *paideia* more loosely to refer to any effort to teach civic virtue particularly through rhetorical education” (80). Longaker combines his version of *paideia* with historical materialism, the study of history from an economic perspective, to create an alternative to what he refers to as “ethicist pedagogy,” which attempts to provide ethics instruction in an economic

class vacuum. Through teaching “historical materialist *paideia*” Longaker argues professional communication instructors can make students more effective and critical participants in the development of new economic systems (92).

Another of Longaker’s ideas is that ethics should not to be taught. He raises an issue from another article that refers to the Holocaust as an “ethical enterprise” and makes the point that teaching ethics doesn’t necessarily equate to teaching what is right, only what is appropriate for the situation. I find this line of thinking interesting because it is a counterpoint to Sophistic thinking—that there is no “absolute right.” As the Platonics might suggest, what is appropriate for the situation may be horribly wrong in a larger context. There may be some principles that transcend context. But, to muddy the water a bit, perhaps both views are correct?

These articles suggest opposing approaches to solving similar problems. Although there does seem to be a generally Sophistic slant to them, they do at times contradict one another, as the last example demonstrates. What is useful to me is Sophistic; there is no one right answer to the questions I struggle with in my own teaching. One approach may succeed in one class and fail in another. The only absolute teaching philosophy I can glean from this material is “if it works, do it.”

Media Literacy and Categories of Identity

What is a pedagogy of critical media literacy in the context of identity? As I discussed in the introduction, scholars in the last few decades have called for including media in the composition classroom (e.g. Giroux, Stack & Kelly, Gannaway.) Such calls are explicitly concerned with engaging students critically in thinking about their world and learning to negotiate a landscape of new media and popular culture. These two goals seem ideally paired. Asking students to discover and analyze the ways in which groups of people are presented in popular media addresses those two major goals.

I think it is important to talk about why I have my students focus specifically on categories of identity when they are exploring issues of critical literacy in mass media. Clearly, there are numerous other avenues of exploration that would introduce students to cultural studies; critical categories of identity are not the only route to critical thinking.

In this non-modern (to borrow Bruno Latour's term) culture of electronic overload, the visual is the most obvious and accessible means to "see" the world. Students are exposed to so many visual images on a daily basis that they actually stop seeing them. Asking them to intentionally and carefully look at what they are already exposed to is a key step in cultivating their habits of critically thinking. And the images of people are at the center of this visual world. How are people represented in mainstream media? Students are constantly exposed to images of

people, and often those images either reflect a highly stylized, utopian version of (usually white) middle-class America or they present a very dystopian and stereotyped version of the other. The 20 most popular television shows of the last two decades include comedies like *Seinfeld*, *Friends*, *Sex and the City*, and *Everybody Loves Raymond* and dramas like *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation (CSI)* and *Law and Order* (IMDb). What these shows have in common is their presentations of mainstream culture as heterosexual, white, and middle class. In contrast, other sexualities, lower economic classes, and people of color are depicted negatively—often criminally—or not depicted at all.

Students rarely recognize these images as anything other than mirrors of reality. But of course, they're anything but that. At worst, real groups of people are presented in the least appealing and most stereotypical way possible. At best "the other" is a palatable version of a marginalized identity that appeals to a mainstream audience and maintains a status quo.

Critical thinking in composition classrooms often focuses on issues of categories of identity (race, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) as points at which pedagogy can become more meaningful for both *the other* students and for those students operating from a more mainstreamed perspective. There is little debate at this point, in composition studies, especially, that we want our students not only to learn to write but we also want them to think critically about the world around them, and especially about how categories of identity are represented in culture.

Often those representations are inaccurate or one-sided, so getting students to look critically at them becomes even more urgent.

In recent decades, scholars have increasingly directed attention to entertainment media as an important tool for use in developing critical thinking skills in the classroom. In “Cultural Studies, Public Pedagogy, and the Responsibility of the Intellectuals” Giroux directs his attention to who is responsible for teaching media. He wonders “who can then teach students how to look at the media...critically engage popular culture...or use cultural studies to reform the curricula...” (61). His concern here seems to be that educators are not using relevant theory in the classroom because it is too difficult. I agree with his assessment that “contemporary youth do not simply rely on the culture of the book to construct and affirm their identities; instead, they are faced with the daunting task of negotiating their way through a de-centered, media-based cultural landscape” (68). Giroux advocates for a more media-focused cultural critique to help guide students as they attempt to negotiate these messages. However, while I agree that a media-centered pedagogy is essential, I disagree with some of his underlying assumptions behind this necessity.

Giroux’s invocation of the phrase “the book” here is interesting and contains a double meaning worthy of a brief analysis. First, he means it literally: The book is the printed, hard-covered entertainment culture of previous generations, generations which did not have the television, radio, film, internet, video games, etc. to help answer the cultural questions of youth. But a second meaning here is

ideological. If youth are to develop their identities “by the book” then they are to uphold certain mainstream and accepted practices that don’t deviate from the norm. Giroux’s suggestion here is that new media has made “the book” obsolete, leaving students at sea in a cultural gray area of identity construction. What he fails to acknowledge is that all these new media still present a very narrow construction of identity that sticks to the same mainstream guidelines presented in their ancestral printed forms. Whether it’s a Jane Austen romance novel or Sarah Jessica Parker’s sex life, the message to the audience is basically the same. Giroux says students are lost in all this new media, but I argue that they’re all too comfortable. A major goal for this study is to aid students in critiquing what equates to a repackaged version of the same old limited presentations of identity in entertainment.

To illustrate, we can hardly disagree with Giroux’s assessment that Disney “functions as an expansive teaching machine which appropriates media and popular culture in order to rewrite public memory and offer young people an increasingly privatized and commercialized notion of citizenship” (68). However, while Giroux’s critique of Disney’s impact on developing youth may be correct, he fails to recognize that this also equates to a great deal of student resistance when anything remotely anti-Disney is presented in the classroom because it is a central text in their development as individuals. Giroux’s own recognition of the fallacy of “mere entertainment” fails to note the real love and devotion such media engender in their audiences. There is a real sense of ownership of the mainstream narratives,

and no longer confined to “the book,” those narratives have proliferated into every aspect of our students’ lives. Popular culture is not an outsider in the classroom since student identities are so closely tied to it. This connection, however, creates resistance between pedagogical goals for critiquing the media and students’ self-identification and consumption of it as pleasure.

In “Reading and Writing the Media: Critical Media Literacy and Postmodernism,” David Sholle and Stan Denski discuss the importance of considering student commitment to cultural artifacts when developing a media literacy project:

Teachers must take seriously students’ commitment to and affective investments in various forms of popular culture in order to both critically interrogate self-production and to draw out student ‘activity’ that opens up possibilities for counterhegemonic practices. (314)

Not only is their claim here in line with my experience that students will resist attempts by instructors to negatively critique artifacts from “their” culture, but it also provides some strong support for the use of SF as a useful tool in critical literacy practices. Since SF, as an entertainment genre, is less mainstream, most students are less “committed” to it. They’re more willing to engage in a critique of this genre because the threat level to their own sense of self and identity is lowered. SF can act as a bridge between what they are familiar with and what is foreign; it can allow students safe passage to approaching critique of genres of media and cultural artifacts that they are invested in.

This is perhaps something with which Giroux could not identify; next generation pedagogues have, themselves, been acculturated into a media-saturated environment. I have no more desire to “ruin” media entertainment for myself than I do for my students. So, how do we as educators teach critical cultural studies practices to students while respecting their identities (admittedly still in development), which include the embracing of the very elements of popular culture we hope to have them critique?

In fact, student identity is a central feature of the postmodern college classroom. The concept of individual subjectivity as it’s conceived of in postmodern ways is at the heart of that, making postmodernism a key to this study. James Berlin posited the postmodern subject as a product of discourse and culture:

[E]ach of us is formed by the various discourses and sign systems that surround us. These include not only everyday uses of language (discursive formations) in the home, school, media, and other institutions, but the material conditions (nondiscursive formations) that are arranged in the manner of languages—that is semiotically—including such things as the clothes we wear, the way we carry our bodies, and the way our school and home environments are arranged. These signifying practices are languages that tell us who we are and how we should behave in terms of such categories as gender, race, class, age, ethnicity, and the like. (66)

Unlike the epistemology of modernity, which defines the individual much differently, the postmodern individual identity is complex and conflicted,

constructed and reified by the society from which it comes. And, importantly, it's not always recognized as such. For our students, the identities they inhabit, though complex, are often thought to be natural and normal. Asking student to see past the modern understanding of their own postmodern identities is a central objective in my critical composition pedagogy.

Similarly, Bruce McComiskey explores a decidedly postmodern subjectivity in his approach to composition pedagogy in the text *Teaching Composition as a Social Process*. He is concerned with the tendency of composition theorists to allow a modern binary subject position of students because it creates a politically unsophisticated and problematic construction of identity. He says other theorists have correctly identified the writing subject as important to the discourse but have incorrectly viewed that subject in binary opposition to "the other," whoever that other might be. McComiskey argues instead for the development of a postmodern subject which, like James Berlin's work, draws from Foucault's and Derrida's notions of postmodern identity.

According to McComiskey, Foucault's subjects are formed by "institutionalized dominant discourses. . . [which] construct and socialize these subjects; discursive formations give the illusion that they represent the Truth of the world and that this objective Truth may be known by any sovereign subject who chooses to pursue it" (71) It's clear to McComiskey, as it was to Foucault, that an "objective Truth" is a modern falsehood which has to be made transparent to the subjects socialized by it. Making such false truths transparent cannot, however, be

done easily or in an oppositional way since the subjects are quite loyal to the illusion. McComiskey goes on to argue that the subject-identity has been constructed not only through Foucault's discursive formations, but also what Derrida argued was an affinity for difference. McComiskey argues that "we construct ourselves according to what we perceive in others that we do not perceive in ourselves" (72). Essentially, identity is formed by comparing and contrasting. For McComiskey, finding a useful composition pedagogy that challenges the modern objective Truth, while allowing for a view of identity as non-binary, as well as respecting the loyalty of student subjects to both is key to a successful critical composition process. He wonders: "How can we *teach* students to avoid the binary logic of identity/difference oppositions in their critical writing about culture?" (75). It is a good question, and one McComiskey addresses specifically as he details some of his work in the classroom.

Central to McComiskey's approach is the concept of *negotiation*. "It is my goal" he says, "to help students move beyond identity/difference oppositions that only encourage accommodation or resistance; it is my goal to help them negotiate cultural artifacts, social institutions, and articles about these artifacts and institutions in postmodern ways" (75). Like him, Berlin asserts the importance of negotiation to subjectivity. Berlin argues that the ability to negotiate a subject position occurs within a social context and individual subject positions interact with other individual subject positions, as well as historical, political, and other cultural conditions (74). According to both McComiskey and Berlin, the ability to

negotiate self-identity within a cultural context is central to a dialectic process of critical learning.

McComiskey adds, however, that this process is completely unfamiliar to new college students. Through a process of scaffolding assignments in his classroom, McComiskey teaches his students to position themselves in a middle ground—negotiate their position—to the various texts of culture. In McComiskey’s classroom, he uses rap music as his artifact, but his approach of asking students to negotiate a middle ground rather than “passively accommodate or defensively resist” (81) translates well to other cultural artifacts, including television. He says:

Students in composition courses that focus on cultural categories (race, class, gender), popular artifacts (television, advertizing, pulp fiction), and/or institutions (work, school, religion) benefit from rhetorical and cultural strategies that teach them to avoid the paralyzing either/or logic of identity/difference binary oppositions. For example, students who can construct subject positions in the aporia among competing discourses are equipped to offer viable cultural alternatives to the processes that marginalize certain people. (83)

Clearly, finding practical ways to help students construct more complex subject positions within their writing is essential to a critical pedagogy of identity.

McComiskey’s approach involves writing position statements in response to various cultural artifacts. Donna Qualley has developed another approach to the

negotiation of modern constructions of identity in the composition classroom, what she calls a “reflexive inquiry” model of teaching composition.

In her text *Turns of Thought: Teaching Composition as Reflexive Inquiry*, Qualley explains this model in detail and gives case studies of its function in the classroom. Her reflexive inquiry approach builds on the ideas of those concerned with issues of self-identity in pedagogy, including Gloria Anzaldúa and Paulo Freire. This model “uses reading and writing as vehicles for constructing, deepening, and challenging students’ and teachers’ understandings of their subjects and themselves” (137). One of Qualley’s goals of reflexive inquiry is to get students to “begin to see more clearly how writing and reading the word, the world, and the self are always in continual dialectic interplay” (5). She echoes James Berlin’s belief that teaching composition is more than teaching skills but also involves teaching a particular world view. Qualley’s model of instruction attempts to teach a more multivoiced world view.

After developing her theoretical models of reflexive inquiry and dialogic reading and writing in the book, Qualley turns her focus to actual classroom examples of her method at work. The reflexive inquiry model in the classroom is also collaborative work—students work in groups to research, explore, and compose about a critical topic such as racism. Collectively, students conduct their research and debate issues over a period of time, eventually producing both individually authored and collectively authored texts on the topic which represent

their collaborative discoveries. Qualley notes that collaborative inquiry directs students to:

Negotiate several multiple (and often conflicting) perspectives at once. They must be open to and engage in various experts and authorities on their topics as well as each member of the groups' evolving perspectives.

Collaborative inquiry entails genuine dialogic encounters with flesh-and-blood beings who are capable of talking back. (95)

Qualley's model of inquiry successfully employs the dialogic model of collaboration as students begin to uncover perspectives and knowledge previously unknown to them through an exercise which emphasizes the group's process of inquiry over any end product. Qualley says "collaborative inquiry...works best when students do not try to *conquer or assimilate the other*, but instead, remain receptive and open to surprise and change" (*emphasis added* 97). As students explore a topic together with each of them bringing unique perspectives and opinions to bear on the work, they all gain insights they could not have achieved through a more hierarchical group process or lone scholarship. For Qualley's students the dialogic model of collaboration succeeds in allowing them to uncover and account for critical perspectives they would not have otherwise encountered.

One perspective Qualley is specifically concerned with is the issue of identification with the other. She argues that a "heightened self-awareness or consciousness. . . can occur in response to a dialectic encounter with an other" (138). She does note that dominant discourse can prevail, since reflexivity and

reflection are similar processes. She says that “the encounter with the other initiates the reflexive turn to the self, and the continual interplay between self and other is what prevents self-consciousness from slipping into narcissism and solipsism” (139). The difference here, perhaps, is between looking out at the world and looking down at one’s own navel. Qualley argues that the measure of student movement is not located solely in the improvement of writing but in the student’s demonstration of an ability to be critically self-reflexive.

Qualley’s reflexive inquiry model works very well in the classroom to teach students not only the skills of composition but to open them to a broader world view, a goal which educators from the Sophists to Henry Giroux have shared. One important concept in Qualley’s work is “world travelling.” Qualley, who borrows heavily from Maria Lugones’ work, describes world travelling as “a process of mentally shifting between different cultures or realities in such a way as to acknowledge and affirm the possibility of pluralist perspectives” (96). Qualley encourages her students to become world travelers, but in an abstract way that some students might find difficult or uncomfortable, especially if they usually inhabit a privileged position. She argues that “world travelling and collaborative inquiry work best when students do not try to conquer or assimilate the other, but instead, remain receptive and open to surprise and change” (97). The difficulty in asking students to do this through research and essay writing, as Qualley does, is a lack of experience. Just exactly how does one inhabit multiple perspectives? While Qualley notes that students from traditionally marginalized groups may be better

able to move from world to world (96-97), the issue of encouraging openness by the privileged group is still unaddressed. By asking students to world travel through SF media, which, by definition, is other-worldly, students can travel to another world—within the fiction, literally, another world—and temporarily inhabit a new perspective, one that addresses Qualley’s concerns that the new perspective not be so threatening to the mainstream individual as to be resisted (98).

The notion of travelling to other worlds in order to discuss real world issues dates back to the very origins of science fiction. Arthur B. Evans traces this history in his essay “The Origins of Science Fiction Criticism: From Kepler to Wells” when he explains how early scientists used voyages to the moon as metaphors to reveal their scientific discoveries. For early scientific writers, SF was a rhetorical tool that allowed them to explore radical ideas and theories inside a “safe” and fantastic world of fiction that did not immediately alienate the audience they hoped to persuade.

In the essay “The SF of Theory: Baudrillard and Haraway” Istvan Csicsery-Ronay asserts that “SF is concerned mainly with the role of science and technology in defining human—i.e., cultural—value” and adds that “SF, then, is not a genre of literary entertainment only, but a mode of awareness, a complex hesitation about the relationships between imaginary conceptions and historical reality unfolding into the future” (388). In this context, Csicsery-Ronay’s definition of SF is a useful as a means of conceiving of the genre:

SF names not a generic effects engine of literature and simulation arts. . . so much as a mode of awareness. . . the conceivability of future transformations and the possibility of their actualization. . . SF thus involves two forms of hesitation – a historical-logical one (how plausible is the conceivable novum?) and an ethical one (how good/bad/altogether different are the transformations that would issue from the novum?) (387)

Exploring both the plausibility and the ethics of a “possible future” is incredibly useful for working through critical topics and easily translates to issues of personhood and identity. From the relative safety of an alternate world, marginalized identities and sensitive issues can be explored: What would it be like if there were no gender, or if there were only females, or if race were a disease? These are critical questions with which authors of SF (e.g. Ursula LeGuin, Joanna Russ, Octavia Butler) have already grappled.

Using Television Critically

In the cleverly titled “Epistemology of the Console,” Lynne Joyrich provides an analysis of episodic television and suggests an approach connecting episodic television with depictions of critical categories that would work successfully in an FYC course. She begins with a discussion of an episode of *Roseanne* involving issues of perceived and misperceived “gayness” and the consequences of such representations. She argues that the episode “dramatizes in an especially

instructive way the dynamics—explosive yet banal—that [she] would like to discuss: the way in which U.S. television both impedes and constructs, exposes and buries, a particular knowledge of sexuality” (440). However, while Joyrich’s approach is appealing because it addresses many of the concerns I wish to address with my students, she does not distinguish between genres. My concern with that oversight is in the varying degrees of success students will have in untying the knots of identity presented in the various genres of televised fiction—comedy, drama, and SF.

An uncritical consumption of mass media leads to an audience mistakenly thinking that a particular depiction of a critical category of identity equates to a positive depiction. Although Harvey Fierstein may have advocated for “visibility at any cost” in *The Celluloid Closet*, I argue not all depictions are created equal. In her article “Producing Containment: The Rhetorical Construction of Difference in *Will & Grace*,” Danielle Mitchell notes the danger of making *the other* palatable. She says *Will & Grace*, a show with a central gay character, is “a contradictory site that renders difference visible and even pleasing to a mass mainstream audience while also reproducing logics that enable inequity” (1052). Much of this reproduction of inequity relies on the show’s use of race and class as the butt of its jokes while keeping the gay main character—Will—sexless. In fact, the show’s premise does not focus on the characters’ gay relationships but on the one between a male and a female—the title characters Will and Grace. Further, the show’s one truly gay, sexually active character—Jack—is also the show’s ridiculous buffoon. The sissy

buffoon is one of the oldest character tropes in the history of film and its use in *Will and Grace* is hardly innovative, despite the show's seeming claim to represent real gay people. As Mitchell notes, "the liberal façade created by its discourse of humor and apolitical rhetorical stance...allow the show to appeal to and further normalize oppressive ideologies of class, race, sexuality, and patriarchy even while appearing to advocate on behalf of the gay Other" (1052).

But while comedies like *Friends* and *Will & Grace* do normalize oppression by making *the other* the source of the humor, dramas mislead their audiences in another way. By saturating the show with heterogeneous representations of identity, the audience is falsely persuaded to accept that identity conflicts are already solved. In the show *Sons of Anarchy*, for example, portrayals of various social classes interacting are numerous; it directs attention to the fantastic fiction of the violence and criminal activity and away from the subtle fiction that these classes don't interact. Similarly, shows like *Six Feet Under*, *CSI*, and *Grey's Anatomy* have large, diverse casts: gay and lesbian couples, Asian, African American, and Latino/a professionals, as well as people of various ages in various relationship and career situations. On the surface, the diversity in the shows seems to be legitimate representations of race, gender, and sexuality and forwards the message of an equal, post-racial world. Unquestioned by the audience is that these "realities" of identity are as much a fiction as the plots themselves.

Because these genres *seem to* represent reality, uncritical viewers accept their brand of reality as truth. Comedy and drama are more difficult for students to

analyze because they claim to be a true representation of the world. An audience tasked with critique of television is hindered by a genre that makes its fictional world seem non-fictional. SF transparently creates a fictional world, one that is not mistaken for reality.

Key Features of SF: The Alien Other and the Alternate Reality

The mirror universe is any number of possible alternative realities within the fictional reality of the piece of literature. For example, the characters in the literature could travel through a “hole” in space to a parallel universe where everything and everyone are duplicated but not identical. The alien other comes from the Hegelian concept of the constitutive other, and can embody the opposite of every mainstream identity without the need for traditional archetypes (though often archetypes are used as well.) Often this alien is monstrous and flawed, but also sympathetic and pitiable, like the vampires in Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire*. Since he/she/it is a fiction, the alien other can be created and destroyed to meet the mercurial needs of the audience. As Octavia Butler points out:

In our ongoing eagerness to create aliens, we express our need for them, and we express our deep fear of being alone in a universe that cares no more for us than for suns or stones or any other fragments of itself. And yet we are unable to get along with those aliens that are closest to us, those aliens that are of course ourselves. (415-16)

Our desire for the alien other is twofold—we want someone to talk to and to care for us, but we also need someone to destroy who is not like us. The alien other functions as an outlet for our own deepest desires, both to love and to hate ourselves and each other. The alien other can convert us, but it can also be cured or destroyed if needed. The alien is a “safe” other, allowing us to explore issues of difference without requiring us to name that difference.

Elaine L. Graham includes monsters as well as aliens in this grouping of creatures we need, and notes the ubiquity of such figures throughout history and across cultures. We need them, according to Butler and Graham because they provide a scapegoat for our fears while also giving us insight into our dark sides—the not-hidden but not-familiar parts of ourselves we treat as spectacle—the so-called abnormal. Graham argues that monsters have two important critical functions: “marking the boundaries between the normal and the pathological but also exposing the fragility of the very taken-for-grantedness of such categories” (39). The audience simultaneously reviles the monster as a freak of nature but categorizes the monster as a product of the nature it seems to defy.

As a trope in multiple fictional genres, the monster is a common archetype, which finds itself frequently alongside other fictional archetypes like the hero and the villain. As an archetype, the monster provides the counterpoint to the hero’s victory and the villain’s defeat. How would we understand the word *odyssey* had Odysseus not slain monsters on his way home? What would we think of Ripley’s actions if no aliens had burst out of her companions’ chests? And like Ripley’s

eventual conversion from killer to mother, we, the audience, begin to see the alien as something more than simply a creature to be feared and destroyed, but one deserving of sympathy, perhaps even respect and tolerance. Part of the function of the alien/monster/other in SF is to give the audience a mirror (albeit a funhouse mirror) to see themselves in “what-if” scenarios and conceive of difference differently. What is interesting about this archetype is that the monster is not simultaneously the villain. Often the monster’s loyalties are ambiguous and shift sides. Frequently, the monster is a victim of circumstance—pitiable rather than malicious.

Of course, the monster trope is a double-edged sword when it comes to difference. Since the monster is abnormal, unnatural, reviled, it becomes easy for fiction to graft real identities onto monstrous characters. Hollywood has made a mint portraying homosexuals as monsters on film. From 1939’s *Daughter of Dracula* through 2008’s *The X-Files: I Want to Believe*, movie audiences have been invited to witness the spectacle of the monster-who-is-also-homosexual. Though these two films are separated by 70 years of history, the fates of the two monstrous characters are disturbingly similar: the predatory killer is eventually killed by “the good guys.” Despite the fact that the monsters in both films (one a vampire and the other a serial killer) are given sympathetic motives, they are both killed by “normal” people. The films’ resolutions hinge on the destruction of the monsters even after audiences have been invited to sympathize with them.

This brief analysis of monster tropes in film is not difficult for scholars to follow and certainly nothing new to critical media analysis. It is, however, something I have not seen used as pedagogy. Bringing these pop cultural critiques into the classroom as a strategy for analysis can provide a comfortable distance from which students can analyze both cultural artifacts and various identities. In Chapter Four I provide some specific examples of students analyzing some of these types of artifacts.

Just as the alien-other represents individual difference, the alternate reality stands in for the world. Being able to explore the world removed from the reality of life creates a space for exploration that might not otherwise be comfortable. Further, the alternate reality in SF is an even more removed space, since a common feature of SF is the alternate universe trope, or what I like to think of as the fiction within the fiction. These alternate realities manifest in SF as dreams, parallel universes characters can cross into, alternate timelines (past and future), and fiction which challenges the normal fiction of the SF reality. Sometimes such plots exchange characters' bodies with other characters or have characters acting under alien coercion. Examples of this include the first interracial kiss on television between Captain Kirk and Lieutenant Uhura on *Star Trek*—the two were under alien control, as well as the same-sex kiss between Xena and Gabrielle, while Xena's consciousness temporarily inhabited a male character's body.

These concepts of the “mirror universe” and the “alien other” are especially useful for this project, which is concerned with helping students “world travel” to

other perspectives and think critically about their own, because they function as a means of exploring marginalized identities, both for the characters within the fictional artifact and for the students interacting with that artifact. Characters can visit these alternate universes on occasion and see their counterparts in the alternate universe inhabiting other identities while the students themselves can inhabit the fictional world of the show for a brief period and “try on” other versions of reality. These tropes can be used to convey issues of morality—caution, pity, or evil—and the audience can learn lesson without the dire consequences of a “real” sacrifice.

Using Television in the Classroom

While some scholars (e.g. Owen, Silet, and Brown, Weedman) argue for television as a critical tool for pedagogy, others put such ideas into classroom application. The 2004 article “Critical Media Pedagogy: Lessons from the Thinking Television Project” by Anandam Kavoori and Denise Matthews presents the findings from a student project called “Thinking Television” that took place multiple times over a four-year period. The project asked students to produce a proposal for a contemporary television show while exposing them to critical and cultural studies theory and analysis.

The authors were interested in determining to what extent critical theoretical models of pedagogy and media production instruction techniques could

be bridged for journalism students. The authors see a gap between critical work in media analysis and common practices which shape how that media is produced. They hope that both the project and the study will help educators “explore the viability of connecting critical media literacy with traditional production education” (100) without making any specific arguments about what that instruction should ultimately look like. They note that this gap between theory and practice is evident in textbooks in the field. Issues of critical theory are divorced from issues of marketability.

Douglas Kellner’s work in critical media pedagogy is a major theory for the project. The authors note that Kellner’s work “suggested that media education should take the lead in providing a scrutiny of the cultural impact of commercial media, especially as they relate to the encoding of media messages and their role as agents of dominant cultural ideologies” (100). Kavoori and Matthews authors find this a particularly important task to work through with students who are the future creators or reproducers of those dominant cultural ideologies.

The authors present the concept of “critical media literacy” as a way to frame what they hope the project does. They note that “this includes understanding of how critical thinking helps to construct people’s knowledge of the world and the various social, economic, and political positions they occupy within it” (101). This is a major goal of my pedagogy also. In addition to Kellner, this core concept is derived from a number of other scholars in the fields of both critical pedagogy and media literacy, including Masterman, Sholle, and Denski. Kavoori and

Matthews also borrow from identity scholarship as a guide for what “critical” actually means in the context of the project. They are concerned with issues of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation as they are presented on television.

Using television as an artifact for considering critical theories of identity and politics is hardly new. In the article, “The SF of Theory: Baudrillard and Haraway” from *Science Fiction Studies*, a journal dedicated to that pursuit, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. observes that Donna Haraway has “drawn central concepts from the thesaurus of SF imagery” to develop her critical theories and adds that her “Cyborg Manifesto” is one of “the most fully developed articulations of the new fusion of SF and theory, and together [with Baudrillard] form the prolegomena to any future SF and global theory that seeks to generate a ‘futuresology.’” (389) Csicsery-Ronay spends his article unpacking the fusion of SF and theory present in Haraway’s and Baudrillard’s work and concludes that “by placing scientific fact in a field full of ‘promising monsters,’ Haraway makes scientific discourse resonate with fiction, i.e., alternative constructions” (394). These promising monsters, while not new, certainly are powerful ones for critical scholarship, not only into “futuresology” but into current scientific and social practice as well.

Unfortunately, like Evans and Csicsery-Ronay, countless SF scholars limit themselves to discussions of SF from the framework of literary criticism; and while I agree with Csicsery-Ronay’s assessment of the genre’s powerful ability to help us conceive of alternate possibilities in the world, I believe even he has created too small a box for what SF’s place might be within the world. To such scholars, SF is for

retrospective study only, and although they acknowledge it is critical, they don't assess its value as pedagogy. If SF can help us conceive of the world critically, it can help students do the same.

In the opening of her "Cyborg Manifesto" Donna Haraway contends that "the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion" (149). In this essay, her cyborg figure is both a fictional creature and a social fact; this human-machine hybrid is "a world-changing fiction" (149). In Evelyn Fox Keller's foundational text on the metaphorical language of science, *Refiguring Life*, she contends that "it is in scientific literature that most science fiction originates" (115). While Keller's statement can be interpreted in more than one way, that is: scientific literature produces fiction which it later "proves" or science fiction uses real science to "legitimize" itself, both readings are compelling ways of considering the relationship between science fact and science fiction. It is worth noting the seriousness with which Haraway and Keller consider the genre of science fiction. It is not the seeming pop culture fluff that some scholars might believe. In Chapters Four and Five, I discuss the change in attitudes towards SF that students experienced in this project as well.

Finding meaningful ways to apply theory to classroom work in a way that allows our students to safely explore alternatives in identity and the world is a basic goal of most instructors and it was part of the motivation for this study. If academic activities were placed on a continuum, theory would be on one end and practice on the other, with pedagogy somewhere in the middle. Connections

between theory and practice—praxis—are present, but often ill-fitting in the classroom, especially in the context of making critical issues important for all students.

The Freirean approaches to pedagogy that some scholars discuss (e.g. Anderson and Irvine), while clearly important for at-risk populations, don't translate well to classrooms of white, middle-class students, especially when the instructor inhabits a traditionally marginalized identity. Alternative approaches like McKee's well-intentioned online forum project was beneficial only to those mainstream students, while continuing to marginalize *the other*. Scholars in SF identify the usefulness of the genre but fail to apply it in a contemporary classroom context, while projects working with television lacked the theoretical focus to give students clear direction. Giroux argues that taking popular culture seriously is a political as well as pedagogical challenge:

The issue for cultural workers is not merely to recognize the importance of cultural texts. . . in shaping social identities, but to address how representations are constructed and taken up through social memories that are taught, learned, mediated, and appropriated within particular institutional discursive formations of power. (*Disturbing Pleasures* 45)

The pedagogy of SF that I present in this study is intended to take popular culture seriously, and close the gaps noted here; it is intended to reach a broad cross section of people, destabilize binaries, and provide a safe space for all students to explore critical issues of politics and identity.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Ethnography and Critical Literacy

In keeping with numerous scholars' work (e.g. Karspecken, Thomas, Anderson and Irvine) in the area of critical pedagogical research, this project employs a critical ethnographic methodology. This methodology is best suited to answering the research questions this study is designed to address. Since a major goal for the study is to uncover how effectively the SF genre of television and film allow students to explore and understand critical categories of identity—race, socioeconomic class, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and culture of origin—an ethnographic approach employing qualitative data analysis was most appropriate.

A key aspect of ethnographic work that this project uses frequently is the fusion of research and practice: praxis. According to Anderson and Irvine's article "Informing Critical Literacy with Ethnography," projects such as mine, which focus on a pedagogy of critical literacy need to use ethnographic praxis to examine some key issues that an empirical study would not be able to address. Such issues include scrutiny of the teaching method (83), serious attention to the importance of acknowledging non-neutrality and the political implications of scientific objectivity (85), as well as addressing basic classroom teaching concerns ignored by empirical work (89).

Clearly, a critical ethnography project has its roots in a Freirean approach to pedagogy, which is concerned with addressing students as subjects rather than objects and removes the hegemonic “banking model” from the classroom in which the instructor “deposits” knowledge into the students. Unlike Freirean classroom models, however, the relative power relations between the students and the instructor present in a Midwestern American university setting are reversed. Unlike Freire’s classroom, or the example of West Indian Creole speakers from the Virgin Islands given by Anderson and Irvine, participant-students in my project are overwhelmingly members of a dominant majority. For the results of this project to be relevant and useful, the course design must acknowledge that important characteristic of the participant make-up. Anderson and Irvine argue that “a critical approach requires that students connect their experience [in the classroom] to larger, oppressive social patterns” (92) and, while I agree with this, I would add that the connection must be relevant to white, middle-class American students. In fact, it may be even more challenging for educators to help mainstream populations of students connect personally to oppressive social patterns since their daily lives are less impacted by overt oppression, but it’s certainly no less critically important. The ethnographic approach this project takes to the classroom subject matter attempts to bring a critical viewpoint to a variety of student identities, while recognizing how the majority of students identify.

In the text *Doing Critical Ethnography*, Jim Thomas notes that critical ethnography “examines culture, knowledge, and action” (2) He argues that this type

of reflection “deepens and sharpens ethical commitments by forcing us to develop and act upon value commitments in the context of political agendas (2). Critical ethnography, according to Thomas, subjects unseen political agendas to scrutiny. In such a project, normalcy—Thomas’ “‘taken-for-granted’ reality”(3)—is challenged and analyzed. If a majority of participant-students inhabit mainstream identities, asking them to challenge hidden political and social norms is a major goal for their coursework and is of primary interest to the researcher and the project.

In this study, the majority of participant-students do inhabit mainstream identities and challenging them to closely analyze their thinking and their world is not a theoretical concept. The major goals of my courses and this study are to aid students’ development of critical thinking around critical categories of identity, regardless of their relative subject positions and help them make critical connections between what they see as entertainment and what they experience as reality. Thomas’ approach to critical ethnographic research is a clear and appropriate path to achieving these goals.

Trustworthiness Features and the Researcher’s Role

In this type of critical ethnography project, the researcher is admittedly politically non-neutral, but that subjective approach still adheres to an established methodology. In the 1988 article “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” Donna Haraway addresses the

issue of objectivity in research, which leads her to explore larger concerns of how subject positions give rise to issues of validity and objectivity in science and technology. Haraway's article begins with a direct challenge to existing notions of scientific objectivity. As a woman occupying a traditionally marginalized subject position, she grapples with the idea that "feminist embodiment, feminist hopes for partiality, objectivity, and situated knowledge turn on conversations and codes...where science, science fantasy, and science fiction converge in the objectivity question in feminism" (596). While she does not answer the question of objectivity with any finality, to be sure, she has provided a direct confrontation of it that researchers can make use of.

It's important to recognize that Haraway doesn't wish to marginalize scientific authority in favor of subjective knowledge. She says instead that "science—the real game in town—is rhetoric, a series of efforts to persuade relevant social actors that one's manufactured knowledge is a route to a desired form of objective power" (577). Her concerns here are particularly relevant to research in communication since knowledge production and socio-political power hinge on how we position ourselves relative to the information we communicate. What Haraway advocates for here is flexibility in positioning ourselves relative to knowledge and objectivity in a way that recognizes the multiplicity and complexity of how meaning is made. For this study, the acknowledgement on the part of the researcher that she occupies a specific subject position becomes a useful place from

which to view results rather than a place which might be thought to compromise those results.

Ann M. Blakeslee, Caroline M. Cole, and Theresa Conefrey's "Evaluating Qualitative Inquiry in Technical and Scientific Communication: Toward a Practical and Dialogic Validity" attempts to put into practice Haraway's theoretical subjective positioning in research. They explore how to make critical, politicized research "good, valuable, or useful" for its researchers and its subjects, determining this partly through "whether researchers and participants believe in the findings of the research and are willing to act on them" (126). Blakeslee et al. describe a means of evaluating their own research that is "meaningful and capable of redirecting our scholarly and professional practice" (125) while simultaneously interrogating traditional ideas of objectivity and validity. However, they move beyond restating the question of what counts as valid, to suggesting that "if the phenomena we observe are, in fact, unstable, we can never ascertain the validity of our observations with any degree of certainty (128). Blakeslee et al. also say they "embrace the tentativeness of [their] work rather than exactitude. [They] will make [their] accounts more honest, thus opening them to broader and more creative interpretations" (128). This re-conceptualization of the validity of results clearly illustrates Haraway's call for an objective subject position rather than a rejection of objectivity altogether. It also demonstrates a rejection of permanent binary categorizations of identity and knowledge that have been generated through the

kind of unquestioned political agendas Thomas is concerned with. This critical method recognizes that uncertainty and non-neutrality have value.

The notion of neutrality is an interesting one and I want to touch on it briefly here. Most students enter college composition courses with the expectation of a politically neutral skills-based environment where they will learn the “correct” process for writing essays. They hold this expectation despite the fact that the courses have titles that include words like “critical thinking” and “analysis.” Interestingly, most students entering this type of course assume that anything not overtly political is neutral, whether this is the classroom setting, the instructor herself, or the media they are exposed to on a daily basis. As experienced critical thinkers, instructors know that there is very little that’s actually neutral in this world. Karen Kopelson argues for making use of the belief in false neutrality even as we challenge students to question it.

As discussed in chapter Two, Kopelson’s “Rhetoric on the Edge of Cunning: Or, the Performance of Neutrality (Re)Considered as a Composition Pedagogy for Student Resistance,” argues that modern instructors, who are also members of “othered” groups, struggle to teach students resistant to critical goals in English classrooms, and expect those classrooms be neutral spaces This resistance is especially noticeable if the instructor seems motivated by personal issues. Kopelson argues for adopting a position of false neutrality in order to overcome this student resistance.

I adopted Kopelson's method of performing false neutrality as part of my in-class teaching as well as in my one-on-one discussions with students. I mention this again in relation to trustworthiness features because in many of my interactions with students, I "performed neutrality" in order to help them move towards a better understanding of critical issues. Examples of this student-instructor interaction are presented in Chapters Four and Five.

Site and Respondent Selection

This study uses student work from six classes of two different courses across three semesters as its primary data. The two courses are English 250: Critical Thinking and Communication and English/Speech Communication 205: Analysis of Popular Culture. English 250 is considered a foundational communication course—the equivalent of Composition II at other institutions—and is a required course for all students at ISU. Most students in English 250 are freshmen and sophomores. English 205 is considered an advanced communication course, meeting a degree requirement for some majors, and was later renumbered 275 to reflect that status. (The renumbering occurred after the data collection stage of this study was completed.) The study uses four different sections of English 250, one of which was an honors section, and two sections of English 205.

Initially, I was hoping to see more sophistication in the thinking and writing of the students in the advanced communication courses as compared to FYC

students since nearly all the students in my English 205 courses were juniors and seniors; however, it quickly became clear the students in the various courses did not show much deviation in ability and style. Except for the differences in the assignments completed, there was not any significant difference in what students in the various courses produced.

At the beginning of each semester, all students enrolled in my courses were given the option of participating in the study. I had an IRB-trained peer from the department come into my classes and administer the informed consent forms, which, along with the complete description of this study, were submitted to and approved by my university's human participant research oversight office, the Office of Responsible Research (ORR). All policies and procedures outlined by the ORR were followed. I was not present during the administration of the informed consent forms and students had the option of declining to participate. Approval forms were held in confidence by the major professor overseeing this project until after each semester's grades were submitted; thus, I did not know who had chosen to participate in the study until all work was completed and grades submitted. All students in the courses completed the same work as their classmates, whether or not they agreed to participate; however, after the semester was over non-participating student work was removed from the data analysis and was either returned to the student or disposed of. A copy of the informed consent form is included in Appendix B.

The total number of students choosing to participate in the study is 108, including 40% identifying as male and 60% as female. No other demographic data was collected on the participants. However, at various points in the semester, assignments, reflections, and questionnaires gave students the option of self-disclosing relevant information about their own identities as well as relevant information about media, genres, and categories of identity. Those data, stripped from participant names and identifying information, is presented in Chapters Four and Five.

Although demographic data on the specific participants was not collected, I wish to emphasize the general demographic makeup of students at Iowa State University, where this study took place. Unlike some universities in other areas of the country and the rest of the world, the student body at this institution is over 80% Caucasian. Many of these students come from Midwestern towns, often small or rural, with very homogeneous economic and social backgrounds. The Iowa State University Office of Institutional Research reported that 81.8% of undergraduate students enrolled in the 2011-2012 school year were white, and 68% were from within the state of Iowa ("Student Profile"). In the typical class of 25 students, there will usually be fewer than three students who do not fit that demographic. While one of the goals for the assignments in this study was to promote critical learning to students from all backgrounds, it is important to note that the classrooms where this study took place do not contain a wide diversity of students.

Table 1 provides an overview of each assignment and its order in the semester for English 250, including the minor assignments connected to the major ones.

Table 1. All assignments for English 250

Major Assignments	Minor Assignments	Description
1. Summary		1-2 page summary of an assigned essay
2. Documented Essay		4-5 page traditional academic argument using research and sources for support
	2.1. Annotated Bibliography	A list of 4 or more sources and how they will be relevant to the topic being explored, in MLA format
	2.2. Thesis Statement	A sentence or two expressing the argument being made in the essay
3. Group Presentation		15-20 minute group presentation of the topic researched in Assn. 2
4. Rhetorical Analysis		4-5 page rhetorical analysis of an assigned television show episode
	4.1. Proposal	Emailed proposal for the analysis
	4.2. Thesis Statement	A sentence or two expressing the argument being made in the essay
5. Visual Argument		5+ page written and visual argument critiquing consumerism and advertising
6. Semester Portfolio		Packaged revision and reflection on all major course assignments

Table 2 provides a similar overview of assignments for English 205. All major assignments for both courses included a peer reviewed rough draft, which is not included in the tables. Exams are also excluded from Tables 1 and 2.

Table 2. All assignments for English 205

Major Assignments	Minor Assignments	Description
1. Archetype Analysis		2-3 page analysis of character archetypes used in an assigned film.
2. Rhetorical Analysis		4-5 page rhetorical analysis of an assigned television show episode
	2.1. Proposal	Emailed proposal for the analysis
	2.2. Thesis Statement	A sentence or two expressing the argument being made in the essay
3. Story Retelling		Group project to critically retell a story popular in culture from a particular lens of identity
	3.1 Script	A working script for the performance
	3.2 Performance	Live or recorded performance of the critically retold story
	3.3 Rationale	A written explanation of why the story needed to be retold and the choices made for the critical retelling
4. Semester Portfolio		Packaged revision and reflection on all major course assignments

All sections of both courses used the same theme: Identity in Popular Culture. This theme uses popular culture media as the subject matter for student investigations into learning about critical categories of identity. In keeping with ISUComm's basic WOVE curriculum, students in a typical FYC course (English 250) complete specified types of major assignments. Important to this study are a summary of an essay, documented research essay (on some aspect of identity), a rhetorical analysis (of a television show), and visual argument (about advertising). The curriculum for the advanced communication course (English 205) is a bit more

flexible, however, and the relevant assignments from that course are an archetype analysis, a similar rhetorical analysis, and a critical story retelling done as a student film project. For a comparison of data across courses, the same rhetorical analysis assignment was used for both 250 and 205. See Appendix A for all course assignment sheets.

Data Collection

For this study, all student work of participants in the courses was collected and examined. This included not only the major course assignments but also reflective essays, worksheet responses to various media, written responses to writing prompts, and emailed assignments. Students assembled an end-of-semester portfolio, in which they revised a major assignment and reflected on the semester as a whole. Students were also asked to fill out several ungraded questionnaires throughout the semester specific to the study. In addition to the materials collected from students during class time, this study also examines email exchanges as well as reflecting on one-on-one interactions between professor and student. Although these exchanges are less formal, they do shed light on the process of analysis for students and how that might have evolved.

Methodology Emerging from a Pilot Project

Prior to conducting the research for this study, I conducted a pilot project in order to establish some methodology and make the larger study as effective as possible. For the pilot study, I looked at a limited amount of student work from a single course assignment—the rhetorical analysis of television assignment in an earlier iteration. Students were not limited to SF television and some guidelines and in-class work were also structured differently. The goals for the pilot project, though similar to the goals for this study, were more specifically concerned with how to make both the assignment and the course more effective and focused on both SF and identity and on establishing some specific parameters for this study. What follows in this section are some general analysis and conclusions which emerged from the pilot study as it impacted this larger study.

Table 3. Emergent Themes in Student Work in the Pilot Study

All Genres	Comedy	Drama	SF
Noting stereotypes	Referencing any depiction as a positive one	Referencing categories without analysis	Student comments on effectiveness of genre
Conflating real people with show's depiction of identity	Confusing comedy with marginalization	Difficulties in focusing on a category	Considering author intent
			Complexity of language/discussion

Some basic themes emerged from the analysis of student essays in the pilot project. Table 3 lists some general themes that proved useful in establishing some

protocols for guiding students in the composition process and in limiting the scope of television genres in the subsequent study.

The first and perhaps least surprising theme was the students' ability to recognize stereotypes. This was the single most common theme from all of the papers, regardless of genre. Almost all of the students were able to recognize at some level that the shows were not depicting real people but overdramatized versions of reality. However, their ability to untangle the fiction from reality did seem to vary from genre to genre. SF did prove to be the genre students had the least difficulty in analyzing. Comedy, on the other hand, proved most difficult.

One key question which emerged from the pilot study was whether the students writing about SF demonstrated more movement in their thinking about critical categories of identity than those discussing drama. Certainly, drama has its merits and I have seen some good analyses emerge from essays on dramas. For that reason, I kept one drama on the list of television show options from which students could choose in the assignment used for this study.

The preliminary findings of the pilot study indicated that SF television could be more useful for students than other genres if the variables listed below are well-regulated. The rhetorical analyses of television written by students during the pilot project did establish that the medium was useful to critical thinking about categories of identity and provided evidence that SF was more effective than other genres. Some overall findings that impacted the dissertation study, which emerged directly from the pilot project include:

- Comedy is the most difficult genre to analyze
- Drama and realistic elements in SF are more difficult to analyze but still valuable
- Plot-driven rather than character-driven shows were more useful
- Limiting the number of choices students have to choose from makes them more able to provide each other with feedback
- For a majority of students, their analyses were more effective when the television shows were less familiar to them

Although the pilot project was a small project with a limited participant group, it provided the researcher with some useful guidelines for focusing the major study and as well as providing some clear insight into making the rhetorical analysis of television assignment more valuable for students overall.

Major Assignments for Analysis in the Study

The rhetorical analysis was the one assignment students in all classes did. Although some type of rhetorical analysis is required for students in English 250, the exact assignment is up to the individual instructor. Since the courses included in this study focus heavily on identity and popular culture, students were asked to rhetorically analyze a particular television show with an emphasis on how categories of identity are depicted.

Since the number of artifacts that students could be asked to analyze rhetorically is nearly endless, why choose television? Rhetorical analysis in the college composition classroom has traditionally focused on written texts, speeches, and more recently, visual texts like advertisements. Why not ask students to dig into something “serious”—something socially and politically meaningful, like Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” or Ronald Reagan’s speech encouraging the destruction of the Berlin Wall? There are some very simple answers to this question. The first is in where our students’ experience lies.

In the article “Teaching Television to Empower Students,” David B. Owen, Charles L. P. Silet, and Sarah E. Brown ask an interesting question that I find relevant: Our students are experienced consumers of television—how can we harness their expertise? Since our students are familiar with the medium, we can focus on critical issues of analysis and identity instead of worrying about teaching them how to “read” the medium. Students in contemporary classrooms—for better or worse—are much more familiar with television as a medium for communication than they are with written documents or political speeches.

This familiarity leads into the second good reason for choosing television: Despite its seeming apolitical positioning as “pure” entertainment in the minds of students, television is not neutral. In a critical thinking course, students need to be taught how to recognize and question the false neutrality of media. Close reading and critical analysis of artifacts are the tools for this goal. In her 1994 text *Transforming Mind*, Gloria Gannaway notes that “helping people learn how to

analytically and critically read the texts of their experience” is a necessary goal of critical pedagogy (20). Clearly, television is one of those texts with which our students have experience but not critical experience.

The rhetorical analysis assignment was broken up into four phases for all students: the electronic proposal, the thesis statement, the rough draft, and the final draft. The assignment sheet that students received detailed these phases and is included in Appendix A. For the electronic proposal, students were asked to watch one of the television shows from the list at least once and take notes while viewing. They were encouraged to watch the show more than once before they wrote the proposal and were directed to watch the show multiple times before completing the assignment. Students were given several prompts with questions for critical viewing that they could use to help them take notes as well as in-class instructions on what to be looking for and thinking about as they watched their shows. The assignment sheet included specific criteria for the proposal, which was to take the form of a business-formatted email to the instructor. Students were told that they were not expected to have a clear thesis at this point in the process but should be exploring what was interesting to them and narrowing their focus. Each student received an individual emailed response back from the instructor with feedback on the proposal.

After the students had completed proposals and received feedback on them, students were given a “walkthrough” during class time. Essentially, this walkthrough had the instructor demonstrate how to move from taking notes and

making observations to actually analyzing. Experience has demonstrated that this is one of the more difficult parts of any rhetorical analysis for students. The walkthrough involved showing a condensed episode of a television show in class (called a “minisode”) and writing out the notes and observations on the chalkboard. When I conduct this lesson in class, I like to use a show with which students are not familiar but that still has some relevance for the overall goals of the assignment. For the classes in this study, I used an episode of the television show *Fantasy Island* called “Edward.” Although it is not what might traditionally be thought of as science fiction, this show fits well into a broader genre of SF.

Both the students and the instructor participate in the process of note taking, generating ideas, and coming up with possible analyses of the television show. Towards the end of the period, the chalkboard is filled—categories of identity presented in the show have been noted as well as observations and research on the rhetorical issues (audience, purpose, and context.) It is at this point that the instructor demonstrates for the students how to take this information and compose an analytical thesis statement. Students often comment how helpful this walkthrough is for them.

At this point in the assignment, students are expected to generate a thesis of their own which will comprise the argument they will make in the final essay. They are encouraged to think of this as a “working” thesis and have the freedom to modify it as their thinking evolves. The thesis statement is due as a typed document during a scheduled individual conference time with the instructor. It is then that

the instructor and the student can discuss the thesis and the television show one-on-one. This conference proves to be very useful for students to refine their ideas or to give them permission to say what they are thinking. During conferences, I often hear comments from students like “I thought about saying something like that but I didn’t know I could.” Additionally, as an instructor, I find these conferences very helpful for a number of reasons. First, students will often surprise me with the ideas they come up with. It provides me with an opportunity to deepen my own understanding of the artifacts I have already been looking at, and frequently makes my subsequent conferences even more useful. Some specific examples of this are included in the chapter detailing the data analysis. Secondly, these conferences give me a chance to check in with students in the process of learning to analyze. For many of them, this type of thinking and writing is completely new. The assignment itself sometimes challenges what they thought they would be doing in a college composition course. Because of this, I have structured my classes so that I teach the rhetorical analysis assignment after both the summary and the documented essay. Many instructors teach the rhetorical analysis before the documented essay.

Scaffolding for the Rhetorical Analysis

Scaffolding in English 250: Summary and Documented Essay

At the start of the semester, I introduce FYC students to and remind advanced communication students of the basic principles of rhetoric and

argumentation. These concepts always include careful consideration of the rhetorical situation—audience, purpose, context, authorship, as well as the means of persuasion—ethos, pathos, logos. These concepts provide a sturdy foundation for students as they move through the more subjective aspects of communication. Additionally, these rhetorical concepts are presented for students in almost every textbook on composition available. My FYC classrooms used *Everything's an Argument* by Andrea A. Lunsford and John J. Ruszkiewicz. Although my advanced composition classes did not have a rhetoric textbook, they were provided handouts to remind them of these basic concepts.

For FYC students, a summary assignment (Appendix A) makes sense coming first—it's short and students need to learn to accurately synthesize someone else's ideas. I assign essays to students for the summary that directly connect to both identity and popular cultural artifacts. By doing this, I have students beginning to read what I hope they will eventually be able to analyze, at least in a small way. For the last several semesters, I have assigned bell hooks' critique of the film *Waiting to Exhale*, an excerpt called "Rambo and Reagan" from a Douglas Kellner book on media and culture, and an article by James Davis examining the magazine *Maxim* and its influence on masculine identity. Although these essays are sometimes difficult for students to fully digest, they usually find that if they follow the instructions given in the assignment sheet and during class, they do pretty well.

After students have had some practice summarizing another author's argument, they get the chance to compose one of their own. At this point, students

begin to work on a documented essay (see Appendix A) that is broken down into numerous smaller stages. This unit of the semester is the longest, and students spend more time on the preliminary stages of this assignment than they do for any of the others.

From the beginning of the semester, we have been talking in class about categories of identity: race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and culture. I even use articles like Dorothy Allison's "What Did You Expect?" in class while working on the summary so words like *lesbian* and *working class* become comfortable and familiar in the classroom context. When we begin the documented essay, the categories we've been talking about more casually become somewhat formalized. Students are now expected to begin researching and educating themselves about these various categories of identity. Their eventual goal will be to present their general research to the rest of the class in the form of a group project and to compose a specific argument in an individually written research paper.

I give students the opportunity (via email) to request a specific group topic from the list of categories (race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, culture) and then assign groups to students. Interestingly, the most requested group throughout the semesters I've taught this assignment is sexual orientation. The least requested is race. LGBTQ-identified students nearly always request sexual orientation and will frequently give justifications for their request, even though it isn't required. For example, in an email one student said "I would like to be in a group that focuses on the identity of Sexual Orientation because that is something

that I think about every day. Being part of the LGBT community, this is a topic that means a lot to me.” This is noteworthy because students rarely provide rationale for their group choices, although sometimes international students requesting culture will do so. I’ve never had a student of color request the race category. I’m not sure what the significance of this is; I simply feel it is worthy of note.

Once students have been put into groups (of about four, depending on class size) they begin brainstorming. Students have been working in class and through their textbooks about composing arguments. By this time, we have spent time in class discussing Steven Toulmin’s model of argumentation in some detail.

Toulmin’s model is an especially useful way of introducing students to arguments for a couple of reasons. First, it presents the concept of argumentation as something other than a binary debate. This is especially important for students who have the understanding that argumentation is about lobbying for a position on one side of a polarized issue. This is also a good point in the semester to discuss fallacies of argument, especially dogmatism, straw man, and ad hominem. Through these discussions, students are encouraged to see that their essays do not need to be pro/con debates.

Second, the Toulmin model breaks down what seems like a complicated and mysterious process into simple steps. I outline five steps for them: claim, evidence, warrants, conditions of rebuttal, and qualifiers. Since we are working on this model of argumentation in class, the brainstorming activity they begin with for the group research centers on this framework.

I give each group a sample claim about their topic that I have composed by synthesizing previous students' work and my experience with this process. These claims are poorly constructed and I challenge the groups to examine the claims using the Toulmin model to discover why they're unsuccessful. (See Appendix C for these example claims.) Students use these "bad" examples to help them see what they need to research in order to be educated on their topic and to add to their list of possibilities for subtopics. Once they have these lists, we are off to the library.

Students begin the research process as a group and I encourage them to educate themselves before they try to come up with thesis ideas. A frequent stumbling block for students is in attempting to defend their preconceived notions. I encourage them to remain open-minded and let the research guide their thesis ideas and not the other way around. The poorly written claims students examined in class take this shape. For example, the race group's claim says "Affirmative action should be abolished" and the culture group's tries to argue that "We need to do something about illegal immigration." Students are encouraged to research issues like affirmative action and immigration before they try to make arguments about them.

We go to the library as a class and begin the research process. The goal at this point in the process is to compose an annotated bibliography of at least four sources that relate to a particular subtopic students have identified. In addition to the brainstorming the groups have done themselves, I have given each group some specific questions they must be able to answer collectively. These questions center

on theoretical perspectives on their topics and are designed to guide their initial research. They are general in nature and are what students will need to know in order to be able to talk intelligently about their topics. (See Appendix C for the list of questions by group.) For example, I ask the gender group what the difference between sex and gender is. This more general information is what they are expected to present on to their peers in the group presentation.

Additionally, students are given some materials which provide a basic overview of various theoretical perspectives connected to their group category. These theoretical perspectives include critical race theory, Marxist theory, feminisms, queer theory, disability studies theory, and post-colonialism. Since these are complex cultural studies theories, I provide students with some simplified principles of the theories as well as directing them to starting sources. (See Appendix C for the in-class handout.)

At this point in the process, students begin to recognize how the various categories are tied together, especially gender and sexual orientation, and race and class. They're encouraged to explore these crossover areas and use them to dig deeper into specific issues surrounding categories of identity. Students who approach this process with an open mind often uncover all sorts of new information. Unfortunately, other students will complete the annotated bibliography with the attitude of "I have my four sources. I'm done." When I review these assignments, I try to give students useful feedback about which sources might be more useful and where they might need to add to their research.

Once the annotated bibliography is completed and students have received feedback on it, they generate a thesis statement. This statement, again a “working” thesis, is due during class time, and we work through them in class with a thesis revision exercise as well as Toulmin’s model of argument. Some of the biggest issues with initial thesis statements are a lack of specificity and a lack of a debatable claim. Revising thesis statements in their small groups helps alleviate some of these issues and students are encouraged to visit with me during office hours as well.

After their theses, students complete rough drafts and conduct peer reviews of those drafts. After that, students revise and finally turn in a “final” draft for grading. While I do not tell students this ahead of time, I always think of these graded essays as their first drafts and when I hand them back, I give the students the opportunity to revise the essay once more. I usually have about one third to half the class choosing to do the optional revision.

By the end of the documented essay assignment students have spent a lot of time thinking about identity in a variety of cultural contexts. When we begin the rhetorical analysis project students have a pretty good grip on concepts like mainstream identity versus marginalized identity. Since much of the foundation is in place by this point in the semester, we can focus on really looking critically at how media shapes our perceptions of ourselves and others. Students have opened up some to thinking about “the other” and to considering that even seemingly

legitimate arguments are not as “true” as they seem on the surface. They have begun to see, as their rhetoric text suggests, that “everything’s an argument.”

Scaffolding in English 205: Analyzing Archetypes

Students in my English 205 courses have already taken English 250 and have (presumably) completed a summary and a documented essay, as well as having written some type of rhetorical analysis previously. Despite this, students in the advanced communication course still need some scaffolding for the rhetorical analysis of television project.

One of the most effective ways of preparing students for the analysis was introducing them to how fiction uses archetypes to tell stories. The students in 205 complete an archetype analysis (see Appendix A for assignment sheet) as the first assignment in the course. This analysis asks them to select a film from a provided list and identify the archetypes used in the film and analyze how they meet the criteria for the specific conventions.

Prior to completing the essay, we have worked in class on what archetypes are and why they are used, as well as viewing and discussing various films and television shows from that perspective. Although the in-class examples are not limited to SF, the films offered for selection in the assignment are. This is partly because archetypes are so commonly used in SF. Once students have gotten some experience with archetypes, they’re more likely to consider specific categories of identity as presented in fiction as being shorthand for reality. Although I

occasionally directed students in English 250 to archetypes when it seemed as though they were thinking along those lines, all students in English 205 were asked to consider them.

Tracking Movement in Student Work

Throughout the semester, students work on deepening their knowledge and understanding of critical categories of identity, sharpening their analysis skills, and practicing both by examining various cultural and media artifacts. Despite their shared work on these issues in class, their experiences with identity and SF are still varied. Important to this study is the means of identifying what might count as movement since students are clearly not all beginning in the same place.

Table 4 presents a simplified taxonomy of movement in the rhetorical analysis assignment, which was seen in this study's 108 participants. It should be noted that the last category is exceedingly uncommon in non-major communication courses and the second to last category is rare and usually includes students who identify themselves as members of a historically marginalized group. While this is not a full account of every type of student position or possible movement, it does represent the type of student movement I discuss in the analysis section. The shaded areas in Table 4 indicate the positions that almost all students occupy with the overwhelming majority fitting in the middle shaded area.

Table 4. Points for Assessing Student Movement

	A. Beginning the Semester	B. Some Movement	C. More Movement
1	Actively resistant to concept that media might shape critical categories	Less overt resistance to concept Attempt to complete assignment as required	Demonstrate that assignment might have value outside of course
2	Passive resistance to concept, assignment	Attempt to complete assignment as required	Demonstrate acceptance that media might be doing more than entertaining or that assignment might have value
3	Willingness, genuine confusion/ignorance about concept, assignment	Demonstration of accepting that media might be doing more than entertaining	Insight into a critical issue previously unaware of, perhaps evoking emotion
4	Willingness, naïve awareness of concept, assignment	Insight into a single critical issue previously unaware of, perhaps evoking emotion	Demonstrate understanding and ability to communicate issue
5	Strong desire, conscious awareness of concept, assignment	Demonstration of understanding and ability to communicate issue	Demonstration of increasing sophistication in articulation of issue
6	Strong desire, previous experience communicating about concept, assignment	Demonstration of increasing sophistication in articulation of issue	Fully realized, sophisticated theoretical communication about issue

Students come into communication courses with a variety of identities, ways of understanding and coping with difference, and writing abilities. As Jim Thomas argues, “changes in cognition resulting from new ways of thinking are an important step toward recognizing alternatives (32); for students, even a small change in thinking is a significant one. The critical ethnographic method for this study is designed to recognize even the smallest of steps.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Prefacing the Data

Documenting Movement

Important to the data analysis is developing means of tracking movement for all students, from the resistant students who have no experience with critical categories of identity or media analysis to students with a strong desire to examine the categories and who bring some experience to the work. In Chapter Three, I presented a table depicting student movement in terms of each student's relative position at the beginning and end of the semester. In this section, I provide specific examples of student work, which exemplifies the kind of movement that this study revealed.

The categories of student movement were presented in Chapter Three. These categories are examined in detail here. The discussion of the categories of movement refers to Table 4, which appears on page 93.

Of note, students beginning in categories 1A and 2A are differentiated by the active versus passive resistance that those students demonstrate. It should be noted that students rarely exhibit active resistance towards their assignments or instructor directly, even though they may present opinions during class time that reveal their resistance to certain aspects of media analysis as it relates to categories of identity. Additionally, the few students who begin in category 1A who actively

resisted the course ideals on a meta level tended to fail to complete assignments, drop the course, and/or chose not to participate in the study, making that (fortunately small) group of students impossible to analyze. As mentioned earlier, most students were located in categories 2, 3, or 4, and the bulk of the data analysis that follows focuses on those groups of students.

Lucy, a student who began in my English 250 course in 5A, later took English 205, and because of her experience in the earlier course, clearly began that course in 5C moving well into the 6B-6C category by the end of the second course. No other students were located in that last group. Some specific examples of Lucy's work appear later in this chapter. Importantly, the assignments using speculative fiction (SF) in both courses were sophisticated enough to allow Lucy to continue to grow and experience movement in her thinking and communicating, even as her peers in the courses were experiencing movement on a less sophisticated level with those same assignments. This was one of the overarching goals for the study, which was to demonstrate clearly the usefulness of SF television to aid students coming from a variety of experience levels in the development of critical thinking skills.

Method of Data Analysis

For this study, the data were analyzed using a combination of techniques, including grounded theory and textual analysis. Much of the process involved careful reading student materials. Through that careful reading, I made comparisons between various student works, as well as attempted to answer the

questions posed by this research project both through student work and student reflections.

I spent many months after the data collection period ended rereading student essays and reflections, rereading email conversations, and reflecting on individual and classroom discussions. According to Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, “a sense of absorption and devotion to the work process” is one of the characteristics of a grounded theorist (7). This was certainly true for my interaction with the data I had collected over the course of 2 years. Additionally, they argue that “the ability to step back and critically analyze situations” is also a key feature of the theory (7) and I found that some distance temporally from the material aided in a critical assessment and interpretation of the data. Student essays that I had read as an instructor held new insights for me when I reread them months later with the eye of a researcher.

This chapter provides a great deal of detail in describing the process students went through in creating their written work, as well as a large sampling of the work itself. The analysis provided here comes directly from the data collected throughout the course of the research project. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the data were collected across multiple semesters and include longer written assignments, in-class discussions, one-on-one instructor-student meetings, questionnaires, formal and informal emails, and written student reflections.

Also, I wish to note that student work is reproduced as it was written and many of the examples contain grammar, mechanical, and expression errors. I

wanted to present the student work as it was, but because of the quantity of errors, repeatedly inserting [sic] into the quotations would be distracting. Therefore, the notation is only included when there are very noticeable errors that could be confusing or mistakenly attributed to transcription.

Student Resistance

Important to this discussion of movement is a note about student resistance. In the discussion of important literature in Chapter Two, I argue that certain critical approaches to media analysis are flawed because they trigger an immediate negative response from students. One of the most blatant examples of this “spontaneous resistance” is when students are asked to critique Disney cartoons. I exposed students to Henry Giroux’s scathing criticism of this media giant when I showed students the documentary *Mickey Mouse Monopoly* during class. In the film, Giroux and other scholars critique Disney’s portrayal of a number of critical categories, including race and gender, as well as providing critical commentary on Disney’s commodification of childhood. Almost unanimously students who viewed this film felt compelled during discussion to defend Disney from the critique. Their resistance to the idea that Disney could be in any way “bad” was so pervasive that common responses included ad hominem critiques of Giroux and the other scholars, the defense of Disney’s capitalistic agenda as harmless, and even outright support of racial stereotyping as acceptable in cartoon form. One student (an Asian American female) who agreed with the documentary’s assessment of the racism

inherent in the presentation of the Siamese cats in *Lady and the Tramp* found herself defending her position alone to the entire class. I found it difficult to believe that her peers were actually defending Disney's depictions of Asians to her in light of her personal experience with that very form of racism. Her willingness to side with the documentary against Disney was certainly the exception to the rule.

Although I believe that the documentary presents an accurate critique of some very serious issues inherent with animated Disney films, students rarely agree with it, usually without even attempting to critically engage with the admittedly one-sided critique. Although I remind them that Disney has teams of lawyers and piles of cash with which they can respond, students still feel the need to defend their "childhood friend." After showing this film to classes a few times with the genuine hope that it would not be completely resisted, I began showing it as a tool for teaching about responding to criticism instead.

I even gave students in one section of my analysis of popular culture class the option of writing a response to the documentary as part of their final exam because their classroom discussion of the Disney documentary was so overwhelmingly negative. The only specific requirement they had was that the response needed to contain credible source material. Approximately one third of the class chose this option for their final.

In her response to *Mickey Mouse Monopoly* and to Henry Giroux specifically since he both appeared in the film and was quoted in the student textbook, Ashley begins her essay with the following paragraph:

While in the past Henry Giroux arguments about the repetitive genders roles may have been true they are by no means true into days [sic] society. I would have loved to argue the fact that Disney in fact doesn't follow as strict of gender roles of a lot of the past works that Disney is known for as Giroux says they do. I am however unable to do so as one of the requirements of this assignment was to use at least 2 reliable sources to back up my claim of how I felt Giroux was wrong. I am unable to do so because in my 2-1/2 days of searching for RELIABLE articles that support my point I was unable to find any that strictly adhered to Disney movies. I could find countless Disney bashing articles that came from credited researchers but the only articles that I could find to support my point were either blogs, or sketchy websites from people who may or may not have been credible. (Ashley)

Despite her admitting that credible source material in defense of Disney was not available and that the position stated by Giroux was in fact shared by other scholars, Ashley still wrote her essay in support of Disney. Since she could not find credible sources to back up her claims, she supported her claims with quotes from non-academic and pro-Disney websites as well as personal opinions. She was clearly angry about the “bashing” of Disney and felt the assignment’s requirement of credible source material was unfair. All the research Ashley did confirmed the documentary’s position, yet she still resisted the whole concept of a Disney that was anything other than perfect, or at a minimum benign, entertainment. Her

investment in Disney's construction of gender as it personally impacted her development was unshakeable.

Another student, who felt as Ashley did, composed a more rational-sounding response to the documentary. Instead of rejecting the idea that Disney created dangerous stereotypes, Katie simply stated that the skewed version of reality was acceptable:

Disney's conservative portrayals of gender roles and nationalism provide kid-friendly entertainment for all types of children. (Katie)

For her, the problems Giroux and other scholars identify are not really problems. She accepts the representations of gender and race in Disney's films as perfectly accurate and appropriate. Katie noted that because the Disney animated film *Tarzan* featured white antagonists, it meant that any films with people of color as antagonists were justified, because Disney films had antagonists of multiple races and were therefore egalitarian in their representations. She seems oblivious to the central argument the documentary presents about *Tarzan*, which is that people of color in that particular Disney film have been completely omitted from the entire continent of Africa.

These two students can't seem to see the forest for the trees, as it were. Their identities are too enmeshed with this monolithic pop cultural icon to be able to critique it in any way. That's not to say no students are able to do so. Helen, a student in Ashley and Katie's class, talks about her peers' adverse responses from the in-class discussions in a reflective essay:

Many people in our class were upset by the film...and refused to believe that Disney movies may have a negative effect on the way we view critical categories. I did not speak up during discussion after the movie because I did not want to be torn to shreds. (Helen)

Helen's reaction, however, was atypical. What's interesting to note is that her language choices reflect greater sophistication in understanding than either Ashley or Katie. Helen used the phrase "critical category" while the other students referred to "gender roles." Additionally, Helen, like Lucy, was one of the few students beginning the course in category 5, as indicated in Table 4.

Helen's greater sophistication with the issue is important because it illustrates clearly one of my concerns for this research. The materials and the assignments must be useful for a range of students beginning at a range of experiences and ability levels. Clearly, the above examples indicate using artifacts like Disney, which are very familiar to students, does not do this very well.

Although I was hoping to find artifacts that were foreign to students, there were always a few students who had some familiarity with the SF genre.

Interestingly, students who were familiar with SF did not experience the kind of resistance to analysis that the students familiar with Disney did. Often these students indicated a degree of pleasure at being able to write about something familiar and enjoyable to them. Some even recognized that the subject matter made their writing goals clearer, as Ben did when reflecting on his analysis of the show *Firefly*:

I think I finally came to terms with just what I want to get out of writing. (Ben)

Because he was not struggling with research (a task he identified as troublesome) he felt that what he was attempting to do with his writing made more sense to him than it had in previous papers, especially his documented essay. Similarly, in Renee's reflection on the writing process, she expresses her positive experience with the assignment:

Thank you, Professor Eyestone, for giving me the excuse to watch the show and consider the time I used to watch it "productive." (Renee)

Comments like these support my early hypothesis that students will more willingly engage with and learn from television media than from other genres of television, as well as other formats of SF.

Sorting the Data

As I examined student essays written about various SF artifacts, some specific types of movement began to emerge, which were the kinds I was hoping to see. Although these categories of movement are somewhat generically referenced here, they do map onto the categories of movement I defined in Table 4.

Additionally, I discuss these types of movement in detail later in this chapter when I examine specific student work. Critical to answering the research questions was determining whether or not SF television was effective in aiding students in three main areas:

1. Critical thinking as a whole
2. Thinking specifically about critical categories of identity
3. The ability to communicate about critical issues

Additionally, the analysis of student work as well as an examination of student reflections and comments about their own writing process revealed some interesting information about the attitudes students had towards the SF television artifacts.

In addition to the documentation of movement in critical thinking, some useful examples of student writing emerged from the data analysis, which demonstrated the relative effectiveness of SF television to convey key concepts in composition pedagogy. According to the *Student Guide: English 150 and 250*, ISU's handbook for first- and second-year composition courses, students in ISUComm Foundation Courses at Iowa State will, among other things:

- Analyze professional writing to assess its purpose, audience, and rhetorical strategies
- Construct arguments that integrate logical, ethical, and emotional appeals
- Use effective invention, organization, language, and delivery strategies
- Reflect systematically on communication processes, strengths, goals, and growth

Using the ISUComm Student Guide as well as theoretical materials from critical pedagogues (e.g. Berlin, Qualley, Lee), I synthesized the wealth of concepts critical

to teaching composition, regardless of genre or medium, down to these items, which emerged clearly from the data and are significant to this study:

1. Making claims and supporting arguments
2. Comprehending rhetorical issues—audience, purpose, context, authorship
3. Developing sophistication in language choices and expression

These basic concepts in composition represent the “skills” portion of composition pedagogy. This portion of pedagogy cannot be completely ignored in favor of more critical goals. As James Berlin notes, in addition to our critical goals for the postmodern classroom, educators cannot ignore the needs of students heading to the job market: “We must finally provide a college education that enables workers to be excellent communicators, quick and flexible learners, and cooperative collaborators” (53). While the bulleted items above are those I have identified as key concepts for students learning to communicate, support for them as central to the teaching of composition can be found in most any FYC textbook being used today.

I integrate these concepts into the presentation of data in this chapter because the study was intended to uncover whether or not SF television was effective in teaching critical thinking skills, but it was also always intended to be an effective part of a composition curriculum, which, as Berlin said, prepares students for “the dispersed conditions of postmodern economic and cultural developments” (54). The course and study were designed so that the basic principles of composition were incorporated alongside the critical thinking goals. The data

revealed that SF television was effective in achieving movement in critical thinking as well as the conveyance of important concepts in composition.

The section that follows provides some in-depth discussion of these concepts as they present in course essays and reflections by students as well as a detailed discussion of how individual students experienced movement in their critical thinking.

Although there was a wealth of data collected for this study, the centerpiece for analysis was the rhetorical analysis of a television show essay (see Appendix A for the assignment sheet) that every student in the study wrote. This assignment was designed to aid students in meeting the specific critical and rhetorical goals, as outlined both by the general curriculum of composition and by my specific course expectations. These goals are discussed theoretically in Chapter Two and presented as numbered points on pages 105-6. The following information maps those critical composition goals onto the television shows selected for the rhetorical analysis assignment. Table 5 provides a brief overview of the specific shows and the categories of identity that I saw being usefully presented in the particular episodes. Following the table, I present a lengthier discussion of some key features which I saw as making the specific episodes useful for student analysis.

Table 5. Television Shows and Prominent Identity Categories

Television Show	Episode(s)	Prominent Categories of Identity
<i>Firefly</i>	"Heart of Gold"	Gender, Class, Sexual Orientation
	"Our Mrs. Reynolds"	Gender, Sexual Orientation, Culture
<i>Star Trek</i>	"The Cloud Minders"	Gender, Class
	"Space Seed"	Gender, Culture
<i>Star Trek: Deep Space Nine</i>	"Chimera"	Race, Culture, Sexual Orientation
	*special	Gender, Sexual Orientation
<i>Xena: Warrior Princess</i>	"Blind Faith"	Gender, Sexual Orientation, Ability
<i>Stargate: SG-1</i>	"Hathor"	Gender, Sexual Orientation
	"Emancipation"	Gender, Culture, Race
<i>CSI: Crime Scene Investigation</i>	"Getting Off"	Class, Sexual Orientation
	"XX"	Race, Class, Ability, Sexual Orientation
	"Sound of Silence"	Ability
<i>Six Feet Under</i>	"I'll Take You"	Race, Sexual Orientation
<i>Burn Notice</i>	"Friendly Fire"	Race, Culture, Gender
<i>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</i>	"New Moon Rising"	Race, Sexual Orientation, Gender
*Three episodes—"Dax", "Rejoined", and "Field of Fire"—were assigned as a series to only one student.		

Table 6 has some additional details for why the specific episodes were included. It should be noted that students frequently saw categories and themes in the shows that I had not anticipated. During student conferences, it was always a pleasant surprise to discover that students had seen something in the shows that I had not. I attempted to incorporate the new student ideas into the semesters which followed. Some of these moments of discovery are in the presentation of the data.

Additionally, something surprising for me personally that proved to be the rule rather than the exception across multiple classes was that students seemed

more comfortable communicating about sexual orientation than most of the other categories. Although many students began the semester with an unsophisticated binary concept of sexuality (homosexual/heterosexual), the in-class discussions, presentations, and individual essays on this topic showed the most movement and the least resistance. Conversely, without question, issues of race were the most difficult and showed the least movement.

Table 6. Rationale for the Television Shows

Television Show	Episode(s)	Additional Rationale for Inclusion
<i>Firefly</i>	"Heart of Gold"	Author intent, never aired on television
	"Our Mrs. Reynolds"	Author intent, issues of marriage, use/subversion of archetypes, easy comparisons
<i>Star Trek</i>	"The Cloud Minders"	Author intent, message about class issues
	"Space Seed"	Contextual issues of history and social climate
<i>Star Trek: Deep Space Nine</i>	"Chimera"	Interesting "queered" possibility, complex conflict resolution
	"Dax" "Rejoined"	Episodes are connected thematically for specific character analysis around gender and sexual orientation
	"Field of Fire"	
<i>Xena: Warrior Princess</i>	"Blind Faith"	Wealth of intentional subtext
<i>Stargate: SG-1</i>	"Hathor"	Critically viewed as worst episode of series, problematic representations
	"Emancipation"	Good intentions with problematic representations
<i>CSI: Crime Scene Investigation</i>	"Getting Off"	Problematic conflict resolution
	"XX"	Easy comparisons, wealth of material for analysis
	"Sound of Silence"	Presentation of categories
<i>Six Feet Under</i>	"I'll Take You"	Contemporary issues relating to categories
<i>Burn Notice</i>	"Friendly Fire"	Problematic representations, contextual issues
<i>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</i>	"New Moon Rising"	Author intent, significant moment in history of television

Although I discussed this in-depth in Chapter Three, I want to reiterate the rationale for the order of assignments in my FYC courses. When I first began teaching the course, I taught the major course assignments in the order of summary, rhetorical analysis, documented research essay. After a couple of semesters, I realized the rhetorical analysis assignments were usually very poor and the documented essays showed little improvement over the analyses. Students also seemed bored and somewhat overwhelmed with a lengthy end-of-semester research paper. I decided that the research paper might better serve the students as a tool for teaching them argument and the rhetorical analysis a better paper for allowing them to hone their skills. Additionally, making the topic of the rhetorical analysis a television show aided in overcoming student ennui and frustration.

I noticed that one result of this change in assignment order was that both the rhetorical analysis and the documented essay were better. Students were more willing and, frankly, had more time earlier in the semester to do the research necessary to write a successful documented essay. Since the issue of identity was consistent from one assignment to the next, the research they did early on provided them with a better framework for approaching the analysis. They were better educated on issues of identity before they attempted to critically analyze an artifact of popular culture. While this assignment ordering is not specific to the goals of this study on SF television, it is an important feature of the course in which the students participating in this study were enrolled.

Movement in Critical Thinking

Tracing student movement in critical thinking abilities is, obviously, a subjective undertaking, and I have assigned alpha-numeric categories to it in Table 4 as a way to provide a more objective rubric. Despite this, I often observed student movement in spurts rather than in clear-cut beginning-to-end improvements in the various categories. To suggest that specific student movement in critical thinking is easily mapped onto the categories I describe earlier is misleading; these categories and the student examples presented here are representative of the trends students exhibited overall. The central question I asked throughout the study as I examined particular student work to identify movement was: Are these students experiencing some kind of change in their thinking that demonstrates a shift towards more critical consideration of issues of identity?

As I was tracking student movement in critical thinking, I also wanted to track how SF specifically was involved in the kinds of discoveries students were making as they interacted with the course materials. In addition to gauging a student's beginning location in terms of critical thinking, I wanted to know where they were beginning in relation to SF as a genre. I did this by asking students to fill out questionnaires about their experiences with SF, before, during and at the end of the course. The movement students demonstrated in critical thinking was then also considered alongside their relative experience with SF as a genre.

Critical Thinking as a Whole

At the beginning of the semester in English 250 Lucy, who, despite beginning the semester with an open mind and strong set of analytical skills, claimed she had little experience with SF and admitted she was not a fan of it. By mid-semester, she had revised her opinion of the genre. As she reflected on her exposure to SF and her critique of several episodes of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine (ST:DS9)*, Lucy said:

My appreciation for speculative fiction has increased enormously. It is an exciting genre because of the possibilities it presents to the viewer—it challenges them to become critical consumers of culture by allowing their imagination to engage in critique within imagined space. (Lucy)

She adds that she's impressed by SF's ability to inform audiences about identity:

[I'm amazed by] the power of speculative fiction to aid in the deconstruction of binary, normalistic orientation to critical categories of identity. (Lucy)

She further credits the course assignments with giving her a critical vocabulary to articulate these ideas. She also discusses in a positive way how the SF artifacts she examined allowed her to apply a newly discovered theoretical concept to argumentation as well as her own view of self. At the end of the semester, Lucy reflects on this process:

SF was extremely helpful in practical application of the newly familiar queer theory. I was able to read Star Trek queerly and in doing so recognize object reproduction of what I had examined theoretically. Examination of queer theory within SF has fundamentally transformed my orientation towards, and

understanding of, my personal identity. I recognize the ways in which my own identity is emergent rather than fixed. This is an intellectually exciting and emotionally freeing realization. Problematization of naturalized assumptions keeps me in redefinition of myself and constantly questioning. This transformation has already yielded personal growth. (Lucy)

Since Lucy's starting place was more advanced than her peers it's important to look at work by other students in the same course. Rachel, who worked with Lucy on the group portion of research project, began the semester at the more common starting place, about 3A on Table 4. She notes that her knowledge of critical categories when she began taking English 250 was limited to a brief introduction in a sociology course, and her experience with SF was confined to the *Twilight* series of books. She also said she thought *Star Trek* was "nerdy" but had never seen it, and she was open to judging it for herself.

While not an experienced researcher, Rachel was an open-minded student and benefitted greatly from being placed in a group with Lucy. While Rachel's comprehension of theory and her critique of television were not as sophisticated as Lucy's, she similarly credits SF with broadening her understanding of critical categories of identity. In her reflection on the semester, she notes her own change in perception:

I have come to learn that speculative fiction has more in depth meaning than just the "outside story." I'm glad I watched Star Trek so I could see it connect with my research on queer theory. . . SF was definitely helpful for me when

understanding identity. Anything goes and isn't "weird" when combining/taking apart identities. (Rachel)

While her language here in discussing deconstruction of binary understanding of identity is far less sophisticated than Lucy's, she is demonstrating a new-found ability to conceptualize identity as complex and fluid, which she did not have at the start of the semester. While Lucy's movement from 5A to 5C during the course of the semester certainly resulted in some strong written analyses, Rachel's movement was more pronounced, going from 3A to 4B or 4C by the end. While Rachel's essays were never quite as strong as Lucy's, her movement was certainly the kind I was hoping would be the result of the assignment and the course.

Rachel demonstrates this clear movement in her essay on *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*. In writing about the episode "Chimera", Rachel keys in to the parallel of aliens in the *Star Trek* universe with racial tensions in contemporary society. In her analysis, Rachel writes:

While watching this episode, I tried to attentively watch it queerly. It was extremely obvious which "race" (species) was the norm. The binaries, normal and not normal, were grouped as Humanoids and then those who weren't were "abnormal." Because Laas' honest and trustworthiness was being questioned, Odo's was being questioned as well just because they were of the same species. (Rachel)

Throughout her essay she makes clear connections between the show's depictions of race-as-species, specific examples in contemporary society, and the theoretical

concepts of queer theory and critical race theory she had been learning about, in part with the help of her peer, Lucy. While her language choices and sentence structure remained somewhat unsophisticated, her thinking about the issues expanded greatly from the beginning of the semester.

Critical Categories of Identity

Almost without exception, I see students in my FYC courses (both the courses in this study and others I have taught) struggling with racial issues. More than any other category of identity, race was a problematic category for students in this study to comprehend and talk about. In the early assignments (1 and 2) I have asked students to examine a number of source materials on various categories, including race, in hopes that some level of understanding begins to settle in. Invariably, race continues to be the most difficult. Whenever I encounter this problem in the classroom, I am reminded of Attorney General Eric Holder's controversial 2009 speech, when he commented that "[A]verage Americans simply do not talk enough with each other about race" (African American History Month Program). Students are uncomfortable talking about race in the classroom and their discomfort is reflected in their early papers on the topic. Frequently, students will attempt to argue for a post-racial United States, or for the abolition of policies that favor certain races without a clear understanding of how those policies function. Almost 100% of the time, white students in my classes initially express negative attitudes towards affirmative action programs with only the vaguest idea of what

such programs are. While I encourage research into such programs and discourage outright rejection of affirmative action as a concept, students still struggle with connecting such policies with the actual intent and need for them. Racial inequality, for many of my students, is an issue that they believe was resolved before they were born.

Fortunately, some SF is still challenging this notion. What is useful about SF's typical presentation of race relations is the portrayal of race as aliens and humans rather than blacks and whites. The *ST: DS9* episode "Chimera" presents an interesting conflict that students were able to identify as a parallel with modern race relations. Further, *ST: DS9* goes one step beyond that to present the conflict as being between humanoids and non-humanoids: creatures so different as to not even be made of solid flesh. This demonstrates one of the key principles of SF I identified earlier as a significant tool for the effectiveness of SF as a genre: the alternative reality. The "fiction within the fiction" here is that the aliens in question are so foreign that they seem alien to the "normal" aliens who appear as regulars on the show. Making the conflict revolve around aliens twice removed from the normal fiction of the show allows for a space to explore the issue of the relations between the two groups, and while the intent is to parallel race, no color issues are ever discussed. This kind of alien substitution in SF opens valuable pedagogical "safe space" for students reluctant to acknowledge ongoing race issues.

Students who previously struggled to identify and discuss issues of race in my classrooms, whether in class discussions or in their writing, are able to explore

the topic by drawing parallels with the show. For example, in her discussion of the episode, Susie noted that the character Odo (a non-humanoid living among the humanoids) attempts to fit in throughout the episode, trying not to remind his humanoid friends of how he is different. She says that they accept him because his behavior makes him like them, drawing a parallel from a real-life scenario:

[W]hite individuals view black athletes and musicians as one of their own.

(Susie)

While Susie may not yet have the sophisticated understanding of what it means to “pass” as white she recognized that the conflict in this episode stemmed from Odo’s attempting to pass as humanoid and recognized that asking members of any race to deny themselves or adopt characteristics of another just to be accepted by the dominant group is inherently unfair.

Communicating about Critical Issues

Discussing Stereotypes

By far, the most common assessment of television shows of any genre by students is that they use stereotypes. While this is certainly true, it became clear as I worked with students on their essays that what that actually meant and what the consequences of that might be were less clear.

Some students used the term stereotype as a placeholder for any characterization they couldn’t otherwise put a name to. For example, in Ellie’s

initial proposal for the rhetorical analysis, she names the category she has chosen and the reason for her choice:

Gender - focusing on the stereotypes of the women and how the [sic] are depicted by the show. Mostly focused on the woman is prison. Rationale for my choice - This is worthy of analysis because the way these women are depicted on tv shapes society's idea of women. (Ellie)

While Ellie has an idea that the show is doing something that she should be concerned about, she can't put a name to it. She names gender as her category to analyze because the episode is set in a women's prison and she uses "stereotype" as a placeholder for any negative representation. In actuality, this particular episode's gender representation is the least problematic of its various representations of identity because the episode features two very competent female CSIs solving the case. The way the race, class, and sexual orientation of the female inmates is "othered" in relation to the "normal" female CSIs is much more troubling than their gender.

Often students who used the term stereotype were actually identifying archetypes and tropes they saw being repeated but lacked the vocabulary to accurately discuss them. This was especially common in FYC courses. One of the goals I had for the advanced communication students in English 205 was to introduce them to the concept of archetypes early on in the semester. I asked them to analyze one of several popular SF films (see Appendix A for the assignment sheet, which includes the list of film choices) from the perspective of how the film

employed archetypes as a shortcut to the storytelling. As a class we also spent time exploring various common tropes in film, which also helped students put a name to familiar plot ideas. Students had access to supplemental materials both as handouts and online to aid them in recognizing archetypes and tropes (see Appendix C).

Since class time in FYC courses is limited, getting into issues of when something was an archetype rather than a stereotype was handled one-on-one during conferences addressing thesis statements and drafts. I asked every student who used the word stereotype to explain specifically what he or she meant, and then worked with that student to develop more accurate language to discuss the characters in the show being discussed. For example, in writing about the *Firefly* episode “Our Mrs. Reynolds” Ben noted an archetypal conflict in the episode’s antagonist but refers to it as a stereotype:

Saffron is portrayed as two different very old stereotypes, a demure wife and a deadly seductress. (Ben)

He’s somewhat inaccurately referred to Saffron’s characterization as a stereotype but he has accurately identified two commonly used female archetypes in SF, and has made it the central issue in his discussion of how the show portrays women. In our one-on-one conversation, I encouraged Ben to take a look at archetypal conventions common to SF to help enhance his vocabulary for the analysis he was trying to make. I made this recommendation to Ben individually, partly because I knew him to be one of the few students who self-identified as a fan of SF.

Interestingly, because SF relies quite heavily on archetypal characters, student writing about the characters in these shows was more sophisticated than in the essays on drama. Even when students continued to erroneously use the term stereotype as a placeholder for archetype, they would often correctly identify the specific archetypes the show was using.

Although students who wrote about drama also used the term stereotype in similar ways, it was far less common for those students to be able to sort out what was actually happening with the characterizations. One serious issue these students had was their tendency to conflate fictitious representations with real people.

Identifying the Fiction

This tendency often manifested in students' writing about drama as observations to the effect that the show depicted some characterization about a group and that the example from the show was proof that the characteristic was true. Frequently, this took the shape of a student writing a paragraph or longer summary of a piece of the plot and then concluding that the summary was self-evident of some truth. Almost always, this reference begins with the student using the words "this shows that." While this issue was not confined to drama, it was far more common with drama and with the more realistic aspects of SF. The show *Stargate: SG-1* was perhaps the most difficult one from the SF genre for students to separate reality from fantasy.

Roger's essay on the *Stargate: SG-1* episode "Emancipation" focused on a female main character, Dr. Carter's interaction with a primitive (and non-white) tribe with rigid customs around gender. After several pages of discussion, which included mostly plot summary, the student's final paragraph concluded:

This shows the importance of enculturalization and the significance of understanding other cultures through what is seen from Dr. Carter. In many cases drastic measures like these are not taken, but it is still important, so that you do no disrespect another culture. Dr. Carter found this out the hard way by not complying with the customs of the tribes. She faced many hard trials in which she finally accepted the customs by challenging the chieftain to a fight to the death by the ancient law. While traveling from area to area remember to take into account others customs or else you just may be sold into captivity.

(Roger)

It's clear that not only is Roger struggling to separate the show's fiction from what is real, but he is also interpreting it as a morality lesson for the viewers: Don't do what Carter did or you'll have trouble. Even the title of the episode is evidence that this was not the writers' intended take-away, which was ignored by Roger.

Another episode of *Stargate: SG-1* titled "Hathor" was an even greater challenge to students. This episode depicts the beautiful goddess Hathor, recently awakened after a thousand-year nap, seducing the males of Stargate command (the military base) into becoming her harem. The females on the base, including Dr. Carter, are powerless to convince their male peers of the danger. At one point, the

females are locked in a cell together and, in order to escape, they remove their clothes and trick the males guarding them. Students who watched this show, almost without exception, accepted as reality this ridiculous version of sexuality-as-power without question. When I asked students if they would behave this way towards the opposite sex, most realized how absurd the situation actually was. Still, they struggled to articulate why it wasn't a realistic depiction of sexuality.

Because *Stargate: SG-1* moves back and forth between fantastic fictional elements and realistic depictions of the U.S. military and contemporary society, it was one of the most difficult shows for students to analyze. With this show especially, but with all of the shows to some degree, most students needed a great deal of guidance early in the drafting process to aid them in their critical analyses. I discuss this guided process in depth in the next chapter.

Interestingly, although some students did conflate reality with fiction, they often did so by assuming the author's intent was a specific message about reality. For example, Rick analyzed the episode "Our Mrs. Reynolds" of *Firefly* using gender as his category. Although throughout his essay he consistently equated the show's representations of gender as true in reality, he still identified a clear message:

... the gender roles of the past and ... the backward nature of the old ideals. . .

(Rick)

While his analysis didn't touch on the idea that this message might not be a fact but might instead be the author's intended message, he did get the message. Again, even with the conflation of reality and fantasy, Rick demonstrated movement in his

thinking as he explored how the specific message about gender roles was exemplified in the episode.

Applying Critical Theory

The axis of Lucy's argument in her paper on the three *ST: DS9* episodes, "Dax", "Rejoined", and "Field of Fire," begins with a cultural observation:

Americans live in a heteronormative, patriarchal culture, that with vigorous reflex, first objectifies and patronizes women and second, subjectifies and considers their words and actions. (Lucy)

She goes on to claim that these particular episodes attempt to challenge that cultural tendency:

It prepares the viewer to move beyond reaction to reflection and ultimately real transformation. . . The episode transcends the immediate and simplistic provocation of sexually charged bodies and coaxes the viewer into lasting and sophisticated argumentation about the restrictive nature of cultural constructs. (Lucy)

Her discussion of these shows demonstrates clear movement towards more clarity in applying theoretical ideas to specific artifacts as well as more precision in the language she uses to discuss them as compared to her earlier documented research essay.

What's worthy of note here is that she has developed this level of sophistication as a direct result of researching theoretical perspectives directly

connected to this assignment. Having been first exposed to critical concepts in queer theory only a month before this, Lucy saw a connection between the television show and the theory she had just learned about, and vigorously embraced the task of connecting the two. She expressed her excitement to me during conferences about how surprised she was by the SF show's willingness to undertake the "taboo" subject matter. The final product was an excellent critical essay on the television show. While Lucy was clearly beginning her process in a more sophisticated category, the SF show she watched fueled her movement to an even more sophisticated articulation of issues surrounding critical categories.

One year later, Lucy penned a critique of a Katy Perry music video as a part of her final for the second course she was in with me. She had continued to explore issues of gender and sexuality as well as the theories which might be useful to her discussions of those topics, and her critique of the song "Teenage Dream" demonstrates how her experience researching theoretical ideas for the SF television project informed her later thinking. She begins with a framing quotation from Judith Butler's text *Gender Trouble* and then dives in to a deep analysis of gender representation in the music video. At one point in the critique she argues:

Thinking about patriarchy more generally as a cultural dynamic centrally valuing control and dominance (Johnson 39), it is easier to read "Teenage Dream" as a controlled fantasy, in which heterosexual (and traditional gender performative) ideals are privileged as real and powerful, policing queer ones into a position of almost total silence. (Lucy)

As I re-read her essay for the purpose of this write-up I was again amazed at the level of sophistication Lucy brought to her writing. From the beginning of the semester in my 250 course to the end of the semester in 205 only a year later, her thinking and writing had gone from undergraduate level work to graduate level work. In her own words, she cites the impetus for her growth as the project she did on *Star Trek*.

One of the most striking features of student movement in critical thinking goals is how closely an individual student's movement in critical thinking about a category of identity line up with that student's movement in the overall goals for composition. Almost without exception, students demonstrated movement in their ability to think critically at the same time that they demonstrated increasing sophistication in the various aspects of their writing. Many of the student examples in the next section demonstrate movement in critical thinking even as I am specifically discussing their movement in composition.

Goals for Composition Curriculum

Making Claims and Supporting Arguments

One of the most common features of student writing at the undergraduate level is the lack of a strong thesis. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, one of the major goals for FYC courses is to aid students in developing tools for generating solid claims in their writing.

In student essays, this lack of a solid thesis has a few frequently seen types. In addition to the problems with making claims, students also struggle in predictable ways with supporting the claims they do make. Although, as discussed earlier, the study was meant to meet the overarching goals for composition courses in concert with the critical SF pedagogy, the ability to make and support a claim in an argumentative essay is one of those main goals. Issues students struggle with while writing claims fall into two main categories: making solid claims and supporting their claims with evidence. Table 7 provides an overview of those issues and correlates common problems in making claims with similar problems in supporting evidence.

Table 7. Issues with Claims and Evidence in Student Writing

Making Solid Claims	Supporting Claims with Evidence
No claim at all, reports data on a general topic but doesn't argue anything	Claim stated and descriptive information or summary provided but connections between them not made
A statement announcing the specific issue but not a claim about the author's position	Evidence provided suggests a claim that is never stated
A generic value-judgment or a "should" statement	Claim stated but no evidence provided, an opinion or fallacious argument
Claim is not debatable; statement of fact used as a claim	Claim lacks a target audience; evidence provided does not convince audience
Claim is too debatable; dogmatic argument	"Preaches to the choir", evidence provided isn't convincing to anyone not already in agreement

While these issues are by no means exclusive to essays with topics centered on identity, having students focus on identity across multiple assignments

throughout the semester maintains a level of consistency, which allows for more identifiable movement in both critical thinking and composition. Since the overarching topic remains the same, the relative sophistication in student argumentation is easier to track, both for the student and the instructor.

Another feature of claims students work on improving in FYC courses is in tying a summary or descriptive information to a specific claim they have made; clearly explaining how a summary or descriptive element is useful as evidence for a specific claim they are making is often challenging. The rhetorical analysis of television proved to be a useful assignment in aiding student learning in composing stronger and better supported claims because they had to tie the show's summary into an analysis of a particular category of identity. Additionally, student claims about SF television shows versus claims about other genres of television overall demonstrated more specificity and strength.

The kinds of thesis statements students are making early in the semester are frequently very generic and hyperbolic, and often rely on clichés or idiomatic expressions. Some are so generic that they could be about almost anything. Others, while being more specific to a critical topic, state a fact as though it was a claim or ask a question whose answer is a fact. Here are some examples of student claims from early in the semester:

Things are not always as they seem. Anyone would agree that there are two sides to every story. (Kennedy)

[T]he only true way to avoid conflict is to not say anything at all. (Garrett)

It has been proven that equal or same treatment is not always the case in the criminal justice system between Minorities and Whites (Anglo Americans).

There is also evidence Minorities, mainly Hispanics and African Americans have a high “disproportionality” rate, which means if a certain groups is involved in the criminal justice system at a rate that exceeds its rate in the population. . . So are Hispanics and African Americans really committing more crimes and acting in a more deviant manner, or are they just being caught more often? (Carla)

The average person who is amongst the most economically well-off will be in better health then [sic] the average person who is in the working or poor class. (Dave)

These early-semester claims represent a typical cross section of students from a number of different classes and semesters. These examples are useful markers for tracking the relative movement in students' claims by the end of the semester. Later in the semester these same students demonstrated movement in generating claims:

In the television show Stargate SG-1, the episode “Hathor” exemplifies the critical category of gender and the females’ wavering struggle for respect, power, and equality while also craving praise and the desire to be wanted by

the male characters. . . Here in this fiction a happy ending awaits the long journey of equality. (Kennedy)

The episode "Getting Off" [from CSI] . . . shows the poor people as the bad guys. . . People who already feel negatively about underprivileged people will strengthen their negative thoughts. People who have no bias will now have this image of poor people in the back of their mind and this may affect their thoughts about certain things without them even realizing it. (Garrett)

It seems like women always have to prove that they are "as good" as men and in the "Hathor [sic] episode of Stargate SG-1, it is no exception. Captain Carter tries to override this stereotype by taking charge when the Egyptian Goddess, Hathor, mesmerizes all the men, but women were still shown as the underdog, who had to prove their worth. (Carla)

The representation of women in this episode of Firefly is a much more independent and strong model of the female archetype which could change the perception of women to the mostly male audience of the show. (Dave)

Each of these four student examples represents some kind of movement from the beginning of the semester to the end in terms of generating thesis statements. For Kennedy, the movement is fairly significant; she moves from stating a generic truism to making connections between how a show represents gender and how

that is contradicted by the fiction of a happy ending. For Garrett, a simplistic conclusion is replaced by a concern for how media audiences interpret the messages they see. In Carla's later thesis, she is still struggling to make an argument rather than describe what she sees, but she has demonstrated some movement in that she is no longer asking a rhetorical question but is making a concrete statement. Dave's earlier attempt is simply a statement of fact, which is easily "argued" in his essay since all of his sources agree on that particular fact. In his later essay, he uses the conditional word "could" and attempts to be more specific about who he discusses—instead of "average people" he has identified that the show has a specific audience, and although his description of that audience is still very broad, it still demonstrates movement in his thinking about the people he is speaking about. His later work shows that he is no longer as likely to settle for superficial discussions of complex topics.

Another commonly seen feature in the student thesis statements was presenting a claim that generically reproduced the overarching goals of the assignment itself. Student writing in this category featured a vague claim that simply reworded the expectations of the assignment. Sometimes, however, this flaw still demonstrated movement for students who struggled to grasp the basic concept of having a clear claim. Ellie, for example, opens her analysis of the *CSI* episode "XX" with the blanket statement about the show, which mirrors the instructions in the assignment sheet (see Appendix A):

“XX” has many underlying messages about race, sexual orientation and class.

(Ellie)

This opener simply outlines what the assignment told her was true of television. As her paper continues, the details of the show she uses as examples do point to a more refined thesis idea and her conclusion about the episode actually points to something more specific:

It gives a very binary depiction of stereotypes only allowing there to be two sides of good and bad. Therefore this gives the underlying message of the episode forming stereotypes about race, sexuality, and class. (Ellie)

In some instances, students focused on a specific identity being represented in the show but still lacked the specifics of a claim, instead using a generic blanket statement. In her analysis of the *ST: DS9* episode “Chimera” Susie notes:

Tension has always existed in the United States between people of many different races. (Susie)

While this claim doesn’t add much to the essay’s overall analysis of the specific show, she does make a connection between racial tension as a cultural issue and some specific elements of the show. She notes that the show uses a metaphor of aliens as race to convey its message:

. . . paralleling human beings to white people and Changelings to people of color. (Susie)

Although the essay lacks a sophisticated analysis of this metaphor, her identification of the metaphor itself is clear movement towards a more

sophisticated interpretation of the show. A number of students who watched this particular episode began with a naïve claim that the show's message was "love conquers all."

Another type of claim in which the SF analysis aided student movement in composing stronger claims was in the claim-as-advice type. In her documented essay, for example, Lisa opens with a claim that makes a generic value judgment:

Racism is misunderstood in America today because a large portion of Americans believe that if America operates under colorblindness theory, it will be a completely non-racist society. In actuality Americans need to gain awareness of the fact that racism in America exists. (Lisa)

This is a common trend in undeveloped thesis statements. Students will ask an unspecified audience to gain awareness or make calls for sweeping changes in social behavior. Here, Lisa was attempting to discuss the problem of ignoring race in public sectors (called colorblindness in some theoretical frameworks) but lacked a target audience or specific setting, and had difficulty connecting the theoretical principle with any concrete examples or consequences.

Although she switched to discussing gender rather than race in her rhetorical analysis, she was able, through the examination of the television artifact, to see how the theoretical ideal of gender inequality was being challenged and focused on the analysis of that feature without feeling like she had to provide a moral for her audience. In her later essay Lisa notes that the character Zoe from the show *Firefly* was written for a specific audience and purpose:

Her strength and natural intimidating demeanor demands respect from the men aboard Serenity as well as shows them and the male audience members that she is on the same playing field as they are. (Lisa)

Lisa goes on to make a point about how the audience of the show would sympathize with the show's main protagonist, Mal. She connects a specific feature of storytelling to a specific goal of the author and concludes that through this identification with the protagonist, the author gets his point across:

Whedon reinforces his main message that men need to respect women more in the real world today. (Lisa)

Although she is still focused on generic social changes, her later essay provides concrete connections between the theoretical idea and specific details, and she has identified a specific group to whom the message is directed.

Rhetorical Issues—Audience, Purpose, Context, Authorship

Of all the general communication goals for students in FYC courses, SF television proved to be especially effective in aiding students' understanding about the rhetorical concepts of audience, purpose, context, and authorship. At the beginning of the semester, I introduce students to this concept of the rhetorical situation, a routine approach for instructors using the rhetorically-based ISUComm curriculum. For any given communication, a number of rhetorical factors influence the message. Often, it is difficult to get students to connect ideas of audience, purpose, context, and authorship to a specific communication in any meaningful

way. Factors of authorship (whether the author/creator intended to send a specific message,) purpose (what that message is,) audience (to whom that message was directed,) and context (social, political, temporal, and other influences) are often difficult to grasp for students new to rhetoric and argumentation.

As students begin to examine cultural artifacts, especially earlier in the semester, their analyses often provide generic or surface assessments of the rhetorical situation. For example, when we look at advertisements in class, students frequently identify the audience as “anyone interested in the product” or indicate the purpose is “to sell the product.” A number of in-class activities centered around challenging students to be more specific in identifying the rhetorical situation.

This study showed that an assignment that asks students to do a rhetorical analysis of television often leads students to a deeper understanding of rhetorical issues. It became especially clear, as I compared students’ work with various SF and non-SF artifacts, that consideration of rhetorical issues was much easier for students in SF television shows, especially ones that had clear authorship, like Joss Whedon’s *Firefly* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and Gene Roddenberry’s *Star Trek*. Team-written, studio-productions often were harder to analyze rhetorically. The connection between SF and authorship is worth some exploration here.

Many of these SF authors self-identify with various theoretical frameworks including, notably Joss Whedon’s feminism and Gene Roddenberry’s secular humanism. These self-identifications prove helpful for students when they’re attempting to connect rhetorical issues to their analyses. For example, Joss

Whedon's feminist perspective is a fact numerous students uncover during the drafting process. Such authors intend to put these messages into their work and since SF is part of "geek culture" and identified with non-mainstream ideas, the authors are working in "their" genre. Ownership of not only the story and the show, but the genre itself become the vehicles for "nerd" authors to tell stories of identity. This personal authorship is in direct contrast to shows that use writing teams which follow formulaic storytelling and scripting conventions outlined by their respective studios. *CSI* episodes, for example, are so formulaic that after watching enough episodes, the formula becomes obvious, making the outcome predictable despite the inevitable plot twist.

The more studio involvement there is in the production of telling the story, the more muddled the messages becomes. *Stargate: SG-1* is a great example of author intent getting muddled by studio production. Additionally, some identifiable authors are in conflict with the studios producing their work and the conflict breeds compromise or even subtext. This is hardly new: In the documentary *The Celluloid Closet*, Gore Vidal relates that his subtlety in authoring the relationship between the two main characters in *Ben Hur* was an attempt to hide homosexuality from the studio, not to mention from the film's conservative star, Charlton Heston (*The Celluloid Closet*). In fact, there is a clear correlation between authorship and intended messages about identity that students identified in works of SF but not in other genres. Elaine Graham discusses this correlation when she notes of Gene Roddenberry's original *Star Trek* series:

At a time when many parts of the USA were reluctant to integrate Black and White children in public schools, the racial integration of the assembled company on the bridge of the USS Enterprise was a clear allegory for the values of tolerance, equality and reconciliation. (135)

Roddenberry's intent to reconcile and deal with issues of race and gender on the bridge of the Enterprise is also complicated by his conflict with the studio's concern that he not focus on such sensitive issues. Students who wrote about *Star Trek* or *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* almost always noted Gene Roddenberry's ideology with respect to racial inclusion as well as the more conflicted presentations of gender equality.

In one essay, for example, Kristy argues that the plot of the *Star Trek* episode "Space Seed" is incomprehensible without examining the conflict between Roddenberry's view of women and the demands of the studio to present women in a traditionally subservient way. Kristy notes the original airing of the show was in 1967 and argues:

Rhetorical issues are the only clues to justify an otherwise unfathomable plot line. An educated, career-minded Lt. McGivers falls in love with the "bad guy" Khan, who attempts to take over the starship Enterprise. The use of historical context provides insight into Lieutenant McGivers' actions throughout this episode. (Kristy)

Throughout her essay, Kristy refers to Marla McGivers as "*highly educated and hardworking*" and notes that "*women were fighting for equal rights in culture.*" She

contrasts this with McGivers' strange behavior in relation to Khan when she willingly helps him in defiance of direct orders and the fact that Khan is an abusive despot. Kristy notes:

This whole situation doesn't make sense to a present day audience, especially because she risked everything she had worked for, not to mention betraying her loyalties with the people of the Enterprise. (Kristy)

Kristy concludes that the only explanation for this incomprehensible plot is located in the conflict between the various rhetorical operators:

The idea that a hard-working career-minded women, such as McGivers, would fall for a bad guy like Khan can only be explained through the intended purpose of the writers, the perspective of the audience, and the contexts surrounding the situation. (Kristy)

In one of the more unique student analyses of that same episode of *Star Trek*, Jerry also wrote about the conflict between Roddenberry and the studio, but drew parallels between the presentations of race and gender in the episode with U.S. Cold War superiority. In his essay, Jerry argued that the presentation of non-whites and women as prominent characters on the show was tolerated by the studio, in part, because the episode's plot is tuned to the expectations of its contemporary audience:

To create tension and further identify with their American audience, the writers of Star Trek would pit this chivalrous crew [of the Enterprise] against the evils of dictators and neo-communists. (Jerry)

He adds a comparison between the characters and the political ideals of the time:

Captain Kirk. . . represents the democracy and goodness of the first world, and Khan. . . represents the authoritarian and inhumane leadership qualities of the then communist leaders. (Jerry)

At the end of his essay, Jerry even goes so far as to claim that Captain Kirk represents Christianity and Khan, the evils of sin:

In spite of his inhumane acts, Kirk shows Khan mercy. In a Christlike show of human compassion, Kirk gives Khan a chance not only to live, but rule again. Banishment to an inhospitable planet might not seem ideal, but Khan would rather rule hell than serve in heaven. This comparison to the devil being banished from heaven by God tells the audience that communism is the embodiment of evil while America, with its righteous respect for life is godly. When faced with manipulation, domination, and tortuous murder, Kirk is able to retain his respect for life. This sums up the basic transmission that Star Trek broadcast to the United States. The message states that communism is wholly evil, and democracy is not only good but it is sacred and divine. (Jerry)

Jerry's analysis consistently referred back to author intent in concert and conflict with the needs and expectations of the studio and the audience.

Similarly, students who wrote about *Firefly* or *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* usually made mention of creator Joss Whedon's feminist ideals. Although less constrained by studio demands than Roddenberry, Whedon still had to contend with censorship and pragmatic concerns of ratings and time slots. Some students

referred to these issues in their papers as well. Becky notes that Whedon is “a global women’s rights activist” and attributes *Firefly*’s cancellation after one season to the studio putting the show in “the ‘Friday night death slot’” so its ratings would tank. Despite this, Becky argues, Whedon successfully communicates an intended message in the episode “Our Mrs. Reynolds” to his audience:

[Whedon] believes traditional views of marriage are flawed and wants the audience to embrace a more modern view of romantic relationships. (Becky)

Like Becky, Edward writes in his essay that the *Firefly* crew’s “adventures are carefully crafted by the show’s writer Joss Whedon.” He examines the plot of the episode and concludes:

Whedon uses Saffron’s [the episode’s antagonist] interactions with the crew of the Serenity to express his negative view towards stereotypical gender roles, specifically those of submissive housewives, to a predominantly male and select female audience. (Edward)

In fact, every student who wrote about this particular episode of *Firefly* made a similar comment about Whedon’s intent for his female characters. For example:

Written by the acclaimed feminist Joss Whedon, this particular episode ‘Our Mrs. Reynolds’ readily exemplifies a common characteristic of his works: a portrayal of strong female roles. (Amy)

Another student writes:

Whedon's use of female characters in 'Our Mrs. Reynolds' shows male audience members that women deserve men's respect by demonstrating that women are just as strong and capable as men. (Lisa)

Despite the differing claims made by each student, every essay about this episode contained some kind of recognition of Whedon's intent for his female characters.

In discussing issues of context within a given show, one surprising phenomenon I noticed was students' tendency to discuss social and political issues contemporary to the particular show as though it were distant past history. While a discussion of the 45-year old show *Star Trek* might merit a discussion about the Viet Nam war from a distanced perspective, discussing issues of race or gender still being publically debated from a historically resolved perspective was unsettling. Kelsey, in analyzing an episode of *Xena: Warrior Princess*, attempts to provide some contextual information about the show as part of her argument. She says:

This particular episode aired April 7th 1997 when society believed the representation of femininity and masculinity to be biological. We now know the belief of these roles is entirely cultural; as our views on what constitutes feminine and masculine traits are based on our surroundings, opinions, and images media displays. (Kelsey)

Kelsey discusses the social norm of conflating gender with biological sex as though it was settled once and for all. This issue of presenting ongoing debated ideas in critical categories of identity as though they're historical facts is not a symptom of

her change in thinking from 1997 until now; she would have been too young then to contemplate such ideas, having been only six or seven years old at the time. Rather, it reflects the phenomenon of students believing in background settings present in contemporary media that issues like racial tension or the battle of the sexes are done and over with. The inclusion of the inaccurate “historical” context in her essay represents her attempt to fulfill a requirement of the assignment without actually doing the research that would be necessary to provide an accurate overview of the information. Nevertheless, once she gets away from the contextual information, and instead focuses on the show itself, her discussion gets to a much more sophisticated and salient point about relevant contemporary gender issues.

She spends a great deal of time analyzing the character of Xena and how she simultaneously inhabits both a traditionally strong masculine role and a traditionally sexualized feminine role. Her argument hinges on the notion of a double standard:

[W]omen are obliged to project both stereotypical male and female roles at the same time. . . [which] promotes the fictitious idea that a woman must be hyper-sexualized in order to attract others as well as gain success in life whilst maintaining the masculine image. (Kelsey)

She concludes that while this double standard is problematic, it still reinforces the idea that it's acceptable for women to have both strong masculine and feminine characteristics, which she sees as a good thing. But she also makes a point of stating that this double standard does not apply to men:

What if men were posed this very same thought? Undoubtedly, the reaction would not be similar. (Kelsey)

Despite her naïve discussion of the “history” of gender roles, Kelsey’s analysis of Xena’s gender duality demonstrates more sophistication in considering the specific consequences for a woman who simultaneously inhabits both masculine and feminine roles.

Language Choices and Expression

Another goal for composition is in aiding students in developing sophistication expression and making stronger language choices, and for the classes in this study, especially those choices as they are concerned with issues of identity. Most of these issues are addressed specifically in the assigned style handbook (see Appendix D for assigned texts listed in the course overviews) for the course. Examples of this include using gender-neutral terms like *chair* in place of *chairman* and eliminating sex bias when referencing general groups, like replacing *mankind* with *humanity*. Other language choices suggested in the student texts include correcting outdated terminology, such as using *Asian* to replace the more derogatory term *Oriental* or using *Native American* in place of *Indian*. Almost without exception, students demonstrated increased sophistication from the beginning of the semester to the end of the semester in terms of the choices they made in their language when they were specifically addressing themselves to issues of critical categories of identity.

For a handful of students, this movement was prescriptive and necessary: a few students in early essays were using terms like “colored people” and “mentally retarded.” Similarly, many students would also address me (either in their essays or in emails) as “Mrs.” or would use masculine pronouns exclusively throughout their essays. I attempted to address these kinds of issues early on in the semester and for the most part, students did not repeat these kinds of outdated language choices. Usually, these students later used words and phrases that demonstrated movement in their writing by not repeating the most egregious of these errors.

Other kinds of words and phrases that demonstrated movement towards more sophisticated understanding and vocabulary of critical categories of identity or theory connected closely with individual students’ experiences. One example of this comes from Victor’s essay on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. Unlike a number of his peers, Victor doesn’t use generic terms like “retardation” or “handicapped” when he is discussing the various consequences of FAS; instead, Victor refers to specific developmental issues such as Down’s Syndrome and Autism. In his essay, he cites his own experience as support for his argument: his sister was born with FAS. His experience with that aspect of identity guided his language choices. Although Victor began the semester with a more personal understanding of how words affect perceptions, he was still able to experience movement in his language choices. This was notable in Victor’s television show analysis essay when he begins to use words like “privilege” to discuss the relationships between some of the characters he is analyzing. Despite a more advanced starting point in his language choices with

ability, Victor experienced movement in expressing his ideas about other categories. In particular, in another essay, Victor used the terms “straight” and “homosexual” throughout, without conscious awareness that the two terms aren’t comparable to one another. This example is notable because it illustrates that students’ experiences with one particular category of identity did not necessarily carry over to other categories. All students, regardless of starting points, had the opportunity to experience movement.

For other students, movement in language choices was more sophisticated. Early in her first course with me Lucy wrote a critique of three connected episodes of *ST: DS9* that focused on a single character, Dax, who as an alien capable of changing bodies over multiple lifetimes, has lived as both sexes. Since her species retains the memories of earlier lifetimes, Dax sometimes experiences conflict relating to earlier incarnations of herself. The focus of Lucy’s essay is on Dax’s conflict with re-encountering a past lover now of the same sex and later in expressing characteristics typically associated with the opposite sex.

In an early pre-writing exercise, Lucy discusses a source she has encountered in her research and struggles to find the language choices which will best express the new concepts she is learning about. She briefly summarizes the article and then states how she sees its usefulness:

This notion that the nature and study of sexuality springs forth from complicated intersections between many facets of societal function and conflict will be helpful in examination of sexuality as an inherently

complicated (and implicitly over-simplified) critical category of identity.

(Lucy)

While the concepts she is exploring here are getting into some fairly complex theory, she is using language similar to her peers. Most notably, the phrase “many facets of societal function” suggests a lack of clear understanding of how to connect the theoretical concepts to real-world situations. As she moves through that research project, she begins to make clearer connections between the two. That development in expression becomes apparent in her next major project, her analysis of the three *ST: DS9* episodes, discussed earlier in this chapter.

Student Reflections on the SF Genre

As students reflected on their experiences with SF over the course of the semester, they almost unanimously concluded that they were pleasantly surprised by their experiences with SF, whatever their initial feelings about the genre were. In many cases, students expressed initial skepticism about the ability of SF to provide any useful insight into critical issues but changed their minds by the end of the project.

At the beginning of the semester, Kelsey expressed a clearly negative opinion of speculative fiction. She notes “I don’t like it. It’s boring and honestly, makes me annoyed.” Mid-semester, she had amended her thinking to give SF credit for aiding her writing:

It was difficult for me—but I appreciate it now as a challenge to make me become a better writer. (Kelsey)

By the end of the semester she says her views of SF had changed dramatically:

I never thought to analyze this genre. It's over-exaggerated so it's easy to analyze. (Kelsey)

Despite her initial resistance to the genre, Kelsey engaged critically with the artifacts and found them useful to the growth of her critical thinking around categories of identity. This was especially clear when she discusses the double-standards of gender expectations she observed in the television show she analyzed.

Some Initial Conclusions

Students tended to conflate reality with fiction in shows that had more realistic elements. There was a clear correlation between the level of fantasy and the students' ability to not view the show as an accurate representation of beliefs and attitudes. The more fantastic the fantasy world, the easier it was for students to think and write critically about it.

Students who I would place as beginning in the less developed categories of movement were more likely to choose drama over SF. This is an interesting issue to consider given students' tendency to conflate reality with fiction in drama.

Sexual orientation was easier for students to write about than the other categories. This was true for all genres of television, although students who wrote

about sexual orientation as it was present in drama were more likely to discuss it using binary terms.

It was far easier for students to discuss issues of race if it was being presented metaphorically. Shows in the *Star Trek* franchise facilitated this by substituting aliens for various races, while *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* used monsters like werewolves and vampires.

Students who viewed and analyzed SF artifacts almost unanimously reported positive experiences with SF regardless of their starting points or previous experiences with the genre, including students who self-reported as actively disliking SF at the beginning of the semester.

Student work was aided by having access to materials and information introducing them to basic principles of fiction and storytelling. Although I would have expected students to enter college with a working understanding of plot development, resolution, protagonists, antagonists, etc., many students needed additional help in this area. Additionally, instruction in how stories (especially SF) use tropes and archetypes as part of their construction was very useful.

Rhetorically analyzing television shows, regardless of their genre, was an effective tool in aiding students in their understanding of the basic rhetorical principles of audience, purpose, and context. This was especially true for television shows that had a single author and/or creator, since these were easier for students to research. Interestingly, shows with a single author/creator were more likely to be SF than other genres.

The data presented here provide some strong evidence to support my initial hypothesis about SF television's effectiveness in meeting the goals for critical composition pedagogy. In the next chapter, I analyze the data and connect it to the theoretical approaches that guided my work to see how successful SF media was in meeting those goals.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Answering the Research Questions

At the beginning of this study I asked some key questions that guided this research. I was concerned with developing an effective and critically sound pedagogy of critical awareness in identity issues for students from various backgrounds and with various self-understood identities. Using media critically was central to this goal and, because of my earlier work, I wanted to investigate my hypothesis that SF television was an effective tool. I was concerned that no student be alienated from the critical goals; rather, I wanted all students to experience movement in their thinking regardless of their starting points.

In Chapter One, I articulated the concern that students are consumers of pop culture, but not critical ones; that they view the activity of criticism as inherently negative, especially when it targets artifacts familiar to them; and that their identities and understanding of others are constructed and reified by culture and media in ways that are not necessarily in theirs or others' best interests. These concerns presented roadblocks to the effectiveness of various other pedagogical approaches and a central goal of this study was to find ways around these blocks. I wished to discover whether using television and film in the post-secondary composition classroom aided students in developing critical thinking around

critical categories of identity, regardless of their relative subject positions and individual identities.

Much of the data presented in Chapter Four does suggest that speculative fiction television is more useful than other genres at accomplishing many of the critical goals outlined in the first three chapters. What follows here is some deeper analysis of the student material as it connects those critical issues to the specific cultural studies, critical media, and composition pedagogy theories I presented in detail in earlier chapters. The goal for this chapter is to connect the theory and literature presented in Chapter Two to the themes emerging from the presentation of student work as presented in Chapter Four in order to examine the extent to which a pedagogy of SF television answers the research questions identified in Chapter One as well as overcomes the major roadblocks to student learning. Those questions were:

- To what extent does using television and film in the post-secondary composition classroom aid students in developing critical thinking around critical categories of identity, regardless of their relative subject positions and individual identities?
- How does the SF genre of television help achieve the goals of the post-secondary composition classroom?
- How does the instructor's relative subject position impact students' ability to access and interact with the messages in the media?

- Can students make critical connections between what they see as entertainment and what they experience in reality?
- How can we help students analyze television critically without asking them to abandon the inherent pleasure of its consumption?

Analyzing the Data

The following section provides a detailed analysis of the data that answers most of these questions, and while there was a wealth of data to examine, much of it did not fit neatly into easily divisible categories. Because of this, Chapter Five is broken up into three major subheadings despite the fact that there are actually five questions. The analysis of student work was a messy process and the subheadings in this chapter represent an attempt to map student work and analysis onto the questions presented above. Much of the student work crossed these pre-constructed boundaries and answered multiple questions in a variety of ways.

Additionally, I do not believe the data can conclusively answer whether or not the instructor's subject position impacts the students' work. While a consideration of the instructor's subject position was an essential part of the assignments design and day-to-day classroom instruction, as well as having been addressed in the literature and the methodology sections, the data analysis does not reveal a strong answer to that particular question.

Making Critical Connections between Entertainment and Reality

Throughout the study it was clear that the students were active consumers of popular culture, and that this consumption was usually uncritical. Henry Giroux argues that entertainment media are a form of “public pedagogy” and can’t simply be dismissed by scholars as pure entertainment (even as it is dismissed by the consuming public as such) because it functions to educate its audiences into particular ways of thinking about and understanding the culture it purports to represent. In *Disturbing Pleasures*, Giroux notes that there is a conflict between interpreting popular culture media as anything but entertainment and the presentation of conservative versions of reality as truth. He argues that this gap is often ignored by educators:

[T]he pedagogical and the political come together in sites that are often ignored by the schools—in this case, sites where the struggle over knowledge, power and authority translates itself into a broader battle over the meaning of pleasure, self-formation, and national identity. (x)

The “battle” emerged in my classroom, when students did what Giroux was concerned about: They accepted the fiction as truth. What I saw frequently was that students’ initial responses tended to be similar to each other across classes and semesters, despite their individual experiences, reflecting Giroux’s observation that popular cultural artifacts do act as public pedagogy. As noted in Chapter Two, Gayatri Spivak is similarly concerned with group identity in this context:

Ideology in action is what a group takes to be natural and self-evident, that of which the group, as a group, must deny any historical sedimentation. It is both the condition and the effect of the constitution of the subject (of ideology) as freely willing and consciously choosing in a world that is seen as background. In turn, the subject(s) of ideology are the conditions and effects of the self-identity of the group as a group. It is impossible, of course, to mark off a group as an entity without sharing complicity with its ideological definition. (259)

In many genres of television, especially drama, students are the unwitting representatives of this “historical sedimentation.” They see the fictional worlds presented on television as “natural and self-evident.” They often believe that the people they see represented are how real people look, act, and think—they see the people and scenarios as background. For example, Mindy’s initial response to watching the *CSI* episode “XX” reflects this common trend:

This episode is a very good episode for analysis because there were many types of identities that were shown. There was more than one identity to choose from which made it even better for analysis. I chose to use gender because gender was a main topic in the plot about the jail because it was a male bus driver and female inmate. Sexual orientation was a good idea for analysis because the inmates were all females who were looking for some type of affection. (Mindy)

Statements that an episode “shows an identity” were a common symptom of uncritical viewing. This uncritical acceptance of the identities in the show (e.g. Mindy’s belief in the “truth” that all females look for affection) is often a result of their own (usually) mainstream identities, which keep them from recognizing the fiction in the fiction—although I noted this tendency regardless of their personal identities.

The “condition” of seeing characters and interactions as “natural and self-evident” is something I notice that many of my students enter my classroom with; they believe the representations they see in the media are true-to-life even when those representations don’t match their own experiences. Their “dormant” (Giroux’s term) memory is written over by the memory in the entertainment media. For example, in an early one-on-one meeting with Kennedy to discuss ideas for her analysis of an episode of *Stargate SG-1*, she told me that the show demonstrated how females have power over males because of their bodies. She said this as though it was a fact and her entire essay depended on the idea that this was true. I asked her if, in her personal experience, she was able to control men using her body, or if any of her friends held this sort of sexual power. It was as though I had asked her to go to the moon. She had simply never considered that the media representation of female sexuality didn’t match her own experience as a female. Her own self-knowledge was dormant, replaced by the television’s show’s construction of sexuality which bore little resemblance to her own experiences.

This kind of flat, accepting view of identity on the part of students as it is presented in popular media is concerning because it reveals a lack of critical thinking and is potentially harmful. At its most basic level, students who unquestioningly accept these fictional versions of reality, unconsciously script themselves and others in a way that overlooks important critical issues. Giroux notes that one result of this acceptance is the construction of society as “white, middle class, and heterosexual” (31). He adds that this escapist forgetting results in “memory [being] removed from the historical, social, and political context which defines it as a process of cultural production that opens up rather than closes down history” (31). Other identities and world views are excluded without even getting a voice because the entertainment has allowed the audience to forget anything else exists.

Like Amy Lee’s desire to point out for her mainstream students the falsehoods of their uncritical, self-identified assumption of powerlessness, I also hope to “generate a sense of accountability, a recognition of the very privilege that underscores and allows for [a] sense of detachment and ennui” (Lee 29). Accepting at face value a televised version of this helplessness is especially disturbing and dangerous because it reinforces to traditionally mainstream, privileged students the falsehood that they are powerless within the contemporary socio-political system while simultaneously suggesting that they have no responsibility in any ongoing injustice towards traditionally marginalized people or worse, as Lee noted in her own students, that those issues of marginalization no longer exist.

For example, in multiple discussions of episodes of *CSI*, students began their analysis with an unstated warrant that the demographics of the various characters were accurate and realistic. For example, as part of her initial proposal for her analysis of the *CSI* episode “XX” Jessica observes:

The situation in this show is particularly worthy of analysis because of the rich character developments that occur in such a brief amount of time. The half-heart tattoo was only recognized by the woman detective, and this shows the sensitivity that the men lack. (Jessica)

Jessica’s observation relies on the unstated belief that the show’s essentialized representation of gender in this episode is entirely accurate. She never questions the fiction the show purveys that all women are sensitive and all men are emotionally stunted.

What’s notable about *CSI*’s character presentations is the show’s very intentional leveling of crime and punishment across lines of race, class, and gender. The crimes and criminals (and eventual prosecutions and punishments) erase the realities of a U.S. justice system that contains deep and problematic systemic dysfunction. In the *CSI* universe, there is no racial profiling. The wealthy white man receives the same treatment by law enforcement as the poor woman of color. And while the show sometimes dabbles with instances of discrimination, the *CSI* team always sides with justice and personally solves those issues. The way the show constructs crime and punishment, if accepted at face value, promotes an erroneous view that those few racist or classist problems that might exist in the justice system

are being adequately addressed by the people in positions of power within that system. *CSI* is a contradictory artifact that promotes a façade of comfortable liberal ideals, while catering to the conservative notion that the people in power always work for the best interests of the powerless. Giroux argues that through its ethos of childlike entertainment, Disney “obscures a cultural universe that is largely conservative in its values, colonial in its production of racial differences, in its portrayal of family values” (32). Like Disney, *CSI* uses the formula of sweeping the audience up in a forensic-heavy “whodunit” mystery to distract from their dangerously fictional version of reality.

This is further cemented through the intentional diversity of the cast and setting. The city of Las Vegas, where *CSI* is set, is a metropolitan center where people from a variety of demographics seemingly interact more than in most places. Despite student-viewers’ personal experience to the contrary, the diversity is accepted as fact. By having a diverse cast, the show presents a post-racial world where identity issues don’t impact the functioning of the legal system. This diversity window-dressing is another element of the natural background Spivak is concerned with.

The *CSI* episode “XX” is an excellent example of these kinds of problematic presentations as background. The episode begins with the discovery of the murder of a female prison inmate, the body of whom has been tied underneath a bus for disposal. The investigation leads the *CSI* team to uncover that the murdered inmate was having a sexual relationship with a male prison guard, an unpleasant and

uncooperative fellow, and was pregnant as a result. He becomes the prime suspect in her murder and the CSI team interviews her cellmate, the warden, and several other inmates, learning formulaic “cops and robbers” television details about the various characters, such as the cellmate’s history as a drug mule, and the crooked disposition of the prison warden. Towards the end of the episode, it is revealed that the cellmate and the murdered woman were actually lovers, and, in a final twist, it was the cellmate who had actually committed the murder out of jealousy. The end of the episode is thoroughly unsatisfying: The white, male guard was committing statutory rape, had a strong motive and the opportunity to commit the crime, yet disappears from the story without even a slap on the wrist. The lover, who happens to be African American, impoverished, gay, uneducated—truly powerless—somehow managed to murder the woman she was in love with, conceal the body, and mislead the experienced team of investigators for most of the episode. Frankly, the ending makes no sense. Not only is it a total surprise, it is logically confusing and emotionally unsettling.

For many of the students from a Midwestern middle-class background in my classroom who watched *CSI* for the first time, their tendency was to accept all these contradictions at face value. For example, Cathy wrote in her proposal that she wanted to examine the romantic relationships in the episode:

Specifically on the women “Baby Girl” and her relationship with the Officer and former cell mate. Baby Girl was pregnant at the time of the murder with the officer's baby, but was in love with another woman. While focusing on these

relationships I would be examining class and sexual orientation. This show is worthy of being analyzed because it has a complex story and fairly detailed relationships that can be looked into. It digs deep into her life in order to find out who murdered her and what their motive was. (Cathy)

For Cathy, the show's presentation of how the legal system works is completely accurate, and the show depicts how law enforcement officers work to reveal the motives of criminals. She never discusses the contradictions in how race is presented or why, despite the obvious motives of the white, male officer, the "real" criminal was the incarcerated woman of color. For viewers like her, the show fosters the feeling that "all is well" with a criminal justice system that is, in reality, quite troubled. Because the show sells itself as a realistic representation of crime and punishment, the characterizations and representations are accepted as "natural and self-evident" despite scripted fiction. It is only when students are directly challenged to consider whether or not they are satisfied with the portrayals that they begin to think more carefully about how problematic the presentation of identity actually is—how the background representation is "historically sedimented" (Spivak 259).

Unlike Cathy, some students noted the confusion but were unable to connect the confusion to the show's problematic representations, often dismissing it as a plot twist. For example, in her proposal, Brittany says:

One would assume, kind of like I did in the beginning of the episode, that the bus driver was the killer, and not the woman who cleans the buses. Since the

women that was murdered had a relationship with the bus driver, and he got her pregnant, in his eyes he would have had an excellent reason for killing her so he would not go to jail for sleeping with an inmate. I never would have guessed she killed her on the bus out of a rage of jealousy, and tied her under the bus. (Brittany)

Although on some level, students were aware of a problem in the show's version of reality, they couldn't reconcile that with their acceptance of the show's reality.

Some students writing about the episode, attempted to argue in support of the unsatisfying end:

The writer tried to make you think about relationships in prison. They wanted to show how things change while in prison. (Jill)

Others argued about fictional elements unconnected to the presentations of identity as a way to deal with the discrepancies. Often, the fictional forensics was a target:

Because special effects are largely popular in this series, I [will uncover] the truth within the episode as it oftentimes forms in viewers' minds a highly idealistic representation of what truly happens in real life. (Susie)

I will also explain inaccurate tactics used to gather data for the crime being investigated. CSI is a very popular show that is sending the wrong messages about the procedures of forensic science and also consists of stereotypes. I think it is important to analyze this and prove that what the public sees on television is not reality. (Anna)

Although these students recognized on some level there was a fiction at work, they attributed it to flashy camera work and junk science rather than to the depictions of characters. A few students even argued against some characterizations based in fact:

I think it [the inmate's pregnancy] indirectly shows the stereotypes of males having more power of females, and females end up being the ones who deal with the consequences. (Maggie)

Observations like Maggie's were especially concerning to me since her underlying belief suggested that she did not believe the "stereotype" that men generally have more power than women in contemporary socio-political contexts. On some level she knew there was something wrong, but couldn't separate the small bits of reality from the wealth of fiction.

After reading proposals like these, I would ask students if the episode's ending was satisfying, and they almost always said no. When I asked why not, they had difficulty expressing why. I would further push them by asking who was a likable character and who was not likeable in the episode. Slowly, it would become apparent that the dissatisfaction was from the fact that the least likable character (the guard) was somehow "innocent" while the most likeable character (the cellmate/lover) was a hideous murderer. This was further complicated by the fact that the character was in prison for being a drug mule, a nonviolent crime in which she was as much a victim as a perpetrator.

In Chapter Four, I mentioned the phenomenon of accepting the show's depiction of some characteristic of a group as proof that the characteristic was true. Frequently, I would see this face-value acceptance in student proposals that were often accompanied by phrases like "... this shows that..." or "... as seen in the show..." While this issue was not confined to drama, it was far more common with drama and with the more realistic aspects of SF. The show *Stargate: SG-1* was perhaps the most difficult one from the SF genre for students to separate reality from fantasy. Roger's essay on the *Stargate: SG-1* episode "Emancipation" exemplifies this tendency:

This episode brings up that enculturalization is an important aspect of all civilizations as seen through the trials and tribulations Dr. Carter is faced with.

(Roger)

It's clear that not only is Roger struggling to separate the show's fiction from what is real, but he is also interpreting it as a morality lesson for the viewers—don't do what Carter did or you'll have trouble. Even the title of the episode is evidence that this was not the writers' intended take-away. Because this show crosses lines between SF and realistic depictions of the military, it was one of the most difficult for students to analyze.

I wish to emphasize how important the process was to this assignment. Roger's essay is an example of one in which the student did not actually take all the required steps in the process of composing this essay. He did not submit a proposal nor did he receive instructor feedback on a working thesis statement. Roger's final

draft reflects many of the problematic face-value interpretations a number of his peers also had in their earlier iterations; however, he missed out on instructor and peer feedback to help re-interpret those initial conclusions.

Unlike *CSI*, and dramas like it, shows which make no attempt to resemble the real world do not provide for the same sort of “natural” assumptions. Although SF shows do some of the same things as drama—present intentional diversity, suggest the powerful work for the powerless, idealize society demographically—the notion that this is “the real world” is less prevalent when viewers watch SF. The suspension of disbelief, that necessary feature of fiction, is an active rather than passive one. In shows like *CSI*, the “background” doesn’t require effort to accept because viewers have been repeatedly “primed” by entertainment media to accept it as reality. In SF, on the other hand, the shows do quite a bit of world building to establish exactly what society is like in their universe. Part of my hypothesis for this project was my belief that students who watched SF would be better able connect the fictional world created by SF television to the fictional identities and scenarios presented in that medium. In much of the student writing about the various SF artifacts, I did note that students were able to suspend their assumptions of reality more consciously than with other genres. The level of suspension correlated very closely with how far removed the world presented in the fiction was from a realistic portrayal of the world.

That’s not to say SF is useful and other genres aren’t. In fact, clearly it is important for “cultural workers” to aid students in seeing the dramas for the

fictions they are. Further, students cannot always interpret the fiction of SF alone; many students require a great deal of guidance early on in the process to be able to divorce their thinking from pre-existing assumptions, as was clear in the examples of student proposals given earlier in this section. I do argue, though, that SF artifacts make this process much easier for students, in part because the representations of people and situations in SF are often intentionally metaphorical and therefore less threatening:

In the beginning of the episode [ST: DS9 "Chimera"] it talks about humans are intolerant of differences in others. We have been discussing how differences between people can create problems in society. This episode shows how humans reject others because they are different. When Laas meets Odo's friends, they make fun of him. Laas becomes defensive and speaks harshly. Odo is then harassed for being different. This is common behavior when people that are different interact. I would link this to race or country of origin in my analysis. Odo and Laas are different then the humanoids and this causes people to treat them like they are inferior. This show is worthy of analysis because it shows how people that are different from the majority of the population can be treated as inferior. The minority is oppressed by the majority. (Kevin)

Additionally, the work students do with SF proves to be a stepping stone—I often have students tell me they can no longer watch television for pure

entertainment—they “see through it” in ways they didn’t before. In other words, they are analyzing and becoming aware of the constructed nature of television.

Critical Analysis and the Pleasure of Entertainment

In “Reading and Writing the Media: Critical Media Literacy and Postmodernism,” David Sholle and Stan Denski argue that “teachers must take seriously students’ commitment to and affective investments in various forms of popular culture in order to both critically interrogate self-production and to draw out student ‘activity’ that opens up possibilities for counterhegemonic practices” (314). In order to overcome some of the hesitancy and sometimes outright resistance on the part of students to engage in critique because it is viewed as a negative act—an effort to devalue something many remember fondly from childhood, I used SF artifacts and tried to select ones that were less familiar to the majority of students.

Since SF as an entertainment genre is not as mainstream, most students are less “committed” to it. As a part of the study, I asked students in beginning-of-semester questionnaires what their level of familiarity with SF was. Out of the average of 25 students in a class, on average fewer than four expressed any familiarity, with most expressing no familiarity with SF. Most who said they were familiar with it actually noted only familiarity with very mainstream examples like the Harry Potter films. Fewer than 20 students out of 108 in the study expressed any strong familiarity to SF of the kind actually used in the rhetorical analysis

assignment (Appendix A). Most students were more willing to engage in a critique of this genre because the threat level to their own sense of self and identity was lowered. In this way, this study showed that SF can act as a bridge between what they are familiar with and what is foreign; it can allow students safe passage to approaching critique of genres of media and cultural artifacts that they are invested in. Interestingly, the few who expressed familiarity did not respond as though threatened by the critique, though some expressed initial skepticism. For instance, at the beginning of the semester, Ben, despite self-identifying as a “gamer” and a “big fan” of SF, did not think SF could be useful in a classroom setting. At the end of the semester, Ben reflected that the rhetorical analysis assignment in which he watched an episode of *Firefly* was his favorite assignment, not only because he got to watch a show he really liked, but also because he had to think more critically about what he was seeing. He notes:

I learned a great deal more by writing about it. I took a critical look at the characters. I examined their interactions. (Ben)

Ben’s willingness to look critically at something he was a fan of was, however, an atypical response.

I’ve already spent some time discussing students’ strong responses to specific cultural artifacts that are familiar to them, especially negative responses to criticisms of Disney; however, students were willing to engage with and critically analyze cultural artifacts that were less familiar to them. This often acted as a stepping stone on the way to deeper analysis of more familiar artifacts. The degree

of willingness by students to engage with SF ranged from simply ameliorating the active resistance that some students initially demonstrated in the course, to more engagement with the assignment's goals, all the way to actual enthusiasm about SF and identity. Additionally, the positioning of critique within the context of entertainment aided students in finding a "negotiated" position rather than feeling they were being asked to wholly reject or accept the artifact. For students, negotiating a position in relation to a cultural artifact mirrors what Bruce McComiskey discusses about identity formation in his text *Teaching Composition as a Social Process*.

McComiskey refers to the creation of student identity within a social context as "discursive formations," which become problematic when viewed in concrete, modern terms. In Chapter Two I discuss the distinction between modern Truth and postmodern subjectivity in identity formation, which McComiskey argues is ignored by some versions of critical composition pedagogy. He asserts that "students who can construct subject positions in the aporia among competing discourses are equipped to offer viable cultural alternatives to the processes that marginalize certain people" (83). As I review what my students have done with their analyses of television, I see them doing just that—constructing their positions through their expressions of doubt, and it doesn't matter whether that doubt is tentative or concrete, since the outcome is frequently the same: the students have negotiated rather than accommodated or resisted the cultural artifact.

After some one-on-one discussion of her viewing of *Stargate SG-1*, Kennedy, for example, was eventually able to negotiate a subject position in relationship to the episode by accepting the show's presentation of women as having to live up to a double-standard while simultaneously rejecting their representation of women as objects of sexual power. She observes:

This fictional situation mirrors an everyday struggle I face as an androgynous female looking for the answers and my place in the world. (Kennedy).

Although Kennedy's initial reaction to the show relied on the face value of acceptance of the show's presentation of sex and gender, with guidance, she was able to negotiate a new subject position in relationship to the artifact that accommodated some of its reality while resisting other elements of it.

Just like McComiskey's students, mine attempt to break new ground since it's been made clear throughout the course that the binary pro/con argument is the least useful one. Often students ask for a great deal of guidance from me on what to say about the various television shows, sometimes with frustration when it becomes clear I'm not looking for them to agree or disagree, or to say something is good or bad, but rather to, as McComiskey says, "deconstruct binary representations" (83). Although it is very new for most of them to both critique and enjoy culture, once they begin, they start to see how many more possibilities there are for analysis when they negotiate. McComiskey argues:

This. . . must be the goal of cultural studies composition courses: to teach students to change the cultures that affect them every day by deconstructing

the binary representations while constructing culturally humane and rhetorically effective subject positions in the aporia between identity and difference. (83)

Students who can negotiate their own subject positions in relationship to their own culture are better able to embrace difference without “othering” it. When students write about SF, they begin to negotiate their own subject positions and begin to see that the change McComiskey is hoping for might be good for everyone, and not just those “other” people.

Nearly all students who wrote about the *ST: DS9* episode “Chimera” inserted themselves into the conflict between the solids and the changelings by recognizing neither group was all right or all wrong. Students negotiated their own positions in relation to the metaphor of racial conflict through their ability to empathize with both groups. In her essay, Susie, for example, said:

Talking about these [racial] differences causes a lot of discomfort. (Susie)

This statement, though part of her analysis of the television show, referenced some difficulties she had personally had discussing race in class earlier in the semester.

In her discussion of reflexive pedagogy, Donna Qualley addresses herself to the issue of identification with the other. She argues that a “heightened self-awareness or consciousness. . . can occur in response to a dialectic encounter with an other” (138). She does note that dominant discourse can prevail, since reflexivity and reflection are similar processes. In her essay on “Chimera” Susie discusses contemporary race issues:

This episode makes the comparison of present day white people to Humanoids, and present day black people to Changelings. White people in America are considered to be the majority and black people are considered to be the minority. In present day, black people are more accepted by white people than they previously were, but tension between the races still exists. (Susie)

For Susie, the reflexivity I saw in her rhetorical analysis had to do with her conscious discussion of racial issues (despite the admitted surface treatment,) which directly confronted her own earlier discomfort in discussing race in class. She was able, through the artifact, to put that discomfort to one side and discuss it directly.

In this case, the ability to be critically self-reflexive was aided by the SF artifact that created distance between the issue and the personal experience through metaphor. Student responses to SF demonstrate that they are “making the familiar strange.” Students do have “the stranger experience” as they enter fictional worlds. This is the movement I was hoping for. When writing about SF, students demonstrate an ability to experience empathy for the other. In McComiskey’s language, students are able to negotiate difference, as Susie did when she parallels the discomfort in talking about race to Odo’s discomfort in talking about himself as a Changeling in the *Star Trek* episode.

Examining Categories of Identity in SF Television

I would argue that even a “bad” episode of SF makes space for students to closely examine issues of identity because they have to pay attention to their own subjectivity in relationship to the fiction. The *Stargate: SG-1* episode “Hathor” was considered by critics to be the worst episode in the entire ten-season run of the show. Having watched them all myself, I tend to agree. Interestingly, most students initially accepted its binary and ridiculous representation of gender and sexuality at face value despite not meeting these false standards themselves. When I would discuss the episode with students individually during conferences, I would ask them if that’s how they react to the opposite sex, and they frequently had ah-ha moments of recognizing such fictional gender representations as unrealistic, false, and one-sided. Because of its hyper-sexualized goddess plot line, this episode was especially useful for students’ recognition of false binaries, because of its speculative plot.

Despite its cringe-worthy plot and binary representations, its supernatural presentation of gender is just unfamiliar enough to give students something to analyze, though they do require some guidance. Qualley notes that “when we find ourselves in familiar situations that we can easily comprehend, we may not pay much attention to this instrument of interpretation [subjectivity]. When faced with a new or strange situation or a difficult text, we may be forced to attend to our subjectivity if we wish to make sense” (151). The creation of a “strange situation” is central to SF’s storytelling. As the introduction voiceover for *Star Trek* says, its

mission is to explore strange new worlds. When asked to analyze an SF artifact, a student has to place herself *somewhere* in the fictional world. Students view the world from a particular perspective and in an SF universe, that perspective is tentative and transitory, but very useful. Students can't "see" the story from their dorm room or from the completely nostalgic and uncomplicated vantage point of a Disney cartoon—they have to figuratively travel to another place for a proper perspective. In the *Stargate* universe, Hathor is a 2,000 year old sex goddess whose power over General Hammond and the other male officers is a bit too simple. Despite (and because of) its uncomfortable binary depictions of gender and sexuality, *Stargate's* universe is just strange enough to be worth exploring. This is the case, even when students need a lot of guidance to see their own subject positions in relation to the world, as Cindy and Kennedy did. In her original proposal for the assignment, Cindy discusses why she chose *Stargate: SG-1*:

Women can have such power over men and how weak-willed males can be [sic] from this episode. I see this evolving from the powers Hathor had to how normal women can also have "powers" over men with their bodies and minds. I find this worthy of analysis due to the fact that it's a very relatable occurrence - no doubt there are many men who have been found under the control of women without hardly realizing. (Cindy)

When I met with Cindy to discuss her proposal one-on-one, I challenged her to name instances of women having power over men from her own life. She was unable to do so, and that one question was enough for her to rethink her own

position within the context of that fictional world. In her final essay, she made comparisons between the show's depictions of gender and power and her own life. While she never argued that the show itself presented untrue representations, she did point out that it was not her experience.

Donna Haraway makes a similar argument about subjectivity and perspective when she discusses feminism in science. In her 1988 article "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" Haraway addresses her concerns about how various subject positions give rise to issues of validity and objectivity in science and technology. Haraway begins by directly challenging existing notions of scientific objectivity—modernity—which is, as McComiskey noted, the subject position most college students inhabit. Haraway grapples with the idea that challenging this modern subjectivity in science is critical: "Feminist embodiment, feminist hopes for partiality, objectivity, and situated knowledge turn on conversations and codes. . . where science, science fantasy, and science fiction converge in the objectivity question in feminism (596). For Haraway and other scholars interested in SF, the line between SF fantasy and concrete concerns in the real world is not as clear as some might believe.

Similarly, I would argue science and science fiction are not that divergent, and have a special connection to the composition classroom. What students discover from the process of self-reflexivity will influence their future work, also relevant to the concerns about binary modern identity that McComiskey discusses.

In the specific context of my classrooms at Iowa State University, many of our students are in highly technical fields in science and technology. If they uncover new ways of thinking about identity—about themselves and others—in non-modern terms, this critical thinking will eventually be expressed in their future work. In McComiskey's terms, students will be "equipped to offer viable cultural alternatives to the processes that marginalize certain people" (83). In other words, the process of self-reflexivity within an SF context results in creating a more critical polis. This is the central goal for my pedagogy.

Further, the connections between SF, real science, and self-reflexive views of identity have ethical implications. These ethical implications are especially critical to the emergent polis who are invested in both the future socio-political structure as well as the past and present culture from which they have come. Longaker recognizes students in communication classrooms occupy specific subject positions, which make them complicit in the socio-political structure. Longaker's goal is to assist students in becoming more effective and critical participants in the development of new economic systems (92). By shifting their subject positions—asking them to world travel through SF—they must engage in critical self-reflexivity, which doesn't undermine their investment in the socio-political structure because it doesn't present the world as real, but does allow them to see the real world from another perspective.

I discussed previously the intentional and artificial presentation of diversity apparent in modern dramas like *CSI*. By saturating the show with heterogeneous

representations of identity, the audience is falsely persuaded to accept that identity conflicts are already solved. Much like the issue I identified in comedies like *Will & Grace* in Chapter Two, a diverse cast is frequently mistaken by viewers as good simply because it exists. The show's creators use a diverse cast in a superficial attempt to suggest the show is performing a deeper examination of identity issues. Much like the acceptance of the fiction as simple background, this surface treatment is accepted by viewers as the show's having done the critical identity work already. A good example of this is from the show *Burn Notice*. In the episode "Friendly Fire" the main character, ex-spy Michael, infiltrates a stereotypically impoverished Latino community in Miami to ferret out a wanted pedophile. As the story unfolds, Michael must negotiate a dispute between two rival gangs in order to achieve his goal. Eventually he sides with Omar's gang against Hector's gang because Omar wants to feed babies and get medicine to his people, while Hector is a drug runner. Because Michael befriends Omar, the audience is sympathetic to him, despite his representation as a baggy jeans wearing, gun toting gangster. In fact, the only difference in how Omar and Hector are represented in the show is that Michael, and therefore the audience, sees one as "good" and the other as "bad". Students who watched this show frequently misinterpreted Omar as rejecting the very stereotype of gang-banger Latino males that they actually reinforced. Chuck's initial proposal even went so far as to suggest Omar's desire to feed babies exhibited a Christ-like character:

Seeing a Hispanic from a barrio as a Christ-like figure would be different from the stereotypical way of seeing Hispanics. (Chuck)

Chuck's comment here is notable too because he has done something a lot of student did early on in the process: He has decided that the assignment was asking him to find and analyze identity stereotypes. He wasn't able, without guidance, to see that the obvious distinctions between Omar and Hector the show was drawing attention to were distracting from the more dangerous representation of all Latino males as gangsters.

While I would certainly argue that having diversity is better than not having it, noncritical viewers don't recognize the difference between the existence of a portrayal and an actual positive representation. I would even argue that this is true of all viewers and not just viewers from majority groups; however, support for that argument is outside the scope of what this study was able to reveal.

In any case, asking student-viewers to critique how minority populations were represented on television proved much more effective when those viewers examined artifacts of SF because the fiction of race, class, gender, etc. in SF was obvious rather than selling itself as real representations of identity. No student who watched *ST:DS9* confused Odo's alien species as real—they all understood it as a metaphor. Unlike viewers who watched *CSI*, they saw that the identity conflict between the humans and the aliens were not already solved. That is, the metaphor of species-as-race made real-world racial conflicts apparent and, perhaps more importantly, something worth establishing a dialogue about.

However, that's not to say that students always understood the contemporary relevance to these issues. Occasionally, students would make assumptions that these metaphors applied to identity struggles from the past, often linking them to movements against gender or racial inequality from the middle of the twentieth century. Kelsey, for example, in discussing a 1997 episode of *Xena: Warrior Princess* said that at that time:

Society believed the representations of femininity and masculinity to be biological" and added "we now know. . . these roles [are] entirely cultural.

(Kelsey)

Students writing about the 1999 *ST: DS9* episode "Chimera" similarly identified that as "the past"—a time when conflicts of race were still an issue. The fact that students analyzing SF recognize the rhetorical context of the episodes with regard to social conflict is interesting given because very few made such connections when analyzing dramas from the same time period, which present differences in identity as a non-issue. Since shows like *CSI* represents those issues as already solved students assume that is true, even when they recognize the conflicts exist in SF from the same time. The *CSI* episode "Sounds of Silence" analyzed by students aired in 2001, less than two years after the *ST: DS9* episode yet no students writing about *CSI* mentioned those kinds of contextual issues at all.

As discussed in detail in Chapter Two, a particularly important task to work through with students who are the future creators or reproducers of those dominant cultural ideologies is to get students to "see their role" in mainstream

discourses. This is especially important for students who come from mainstream backgrounds, as is true for the majority of students in the courses included in this study.

In order for the assignments in my study to effectively achieve the goals I had for them, they had to function the same way for all students, regardless of background, while still focusing on the actual students involved in the study. As I was designing the assignments and fine-tuning the details for the courses I would be teaching in this study, I was greatly concerned by the lack of good data addressing this conflict: I found that other studies and theoretical materials addressed themselves to the majority population in the classroom, whether that was a traditionally dominant group, such as Heidi McKee's study, or a traditionally marginalized group, such as Freirean-based work. Knowing that my classrooms were very homogenous, it was important for me to uncover a means of reaching that dominant group without marginalizing the small minority.

Christy Friend makes an important note about how privileged groups often "speak for" traditionally marginalized ones, a feature of public discourse present since the time of the Greek Sophists. Challenging the dominant group's thinking about how they represent themselves and others was especially important given that the concerns expressed by Longaker and Kellner often manifested in real-world pedagogy, as it was in McKee's study of student internet discourse.

In McKee's study, the students' discussions become "dominant," reinforcing rather than challenging normative thinking (McKee 317). This happened, in part,

because the student discussions were neither informed by any theory, nor were they guided away from the binary “trap” through alternative means of analyzing the issue. If the goal was to get students to experience movement in their thinking about identity issues, a more guided assignment would have been more effective.

Students in McKee’s study did not undergo a change in destabilizing binary understanding of sexuality because they simply talked with each other using the knowledge they already possessed. There was no instructor direction for further educating themselves prior to or during the discussion. Unfortunately, the one openly gay student participating in the dialogue was put on display and the others had nothing to analyze as a representation of alternate sexualities except him. I should point out that he was no more or less educated than his peers about identity. Gay students (and students from a variety of other marginalized identities) may have some unique experiences but they, too, are a product of a culture that reinforces binary construction of identity.

I have already discussed many of my concerns with this type of dialogue. Much of the motivation for the assignments I designed for the courses involved in this study came from my desire to avoid the pitfalls of a dialogue that excludes some students and reduces complex issues to oversimplified binaries for others, which easily occurs when discussions about identity are personal and happen without guidance. In Chapter Three I describe the scaffolding I build throughout the semester, which leads up to the television analysis assignment. Before students watch the television shows, they have done some research on various issues and

have been introduced to some theories related to identity, including critical race theory, queer theory, Marxist media theory, and post-colonialism. They have spent time writing and speaking about those issues before they begin analyzing and making arguments. They watch the television shows after having developed a basic understanding of some theoretical ideas beyond what they brought to the class. The question is: Do the television shows they watched actually aid them movement towards a more complex understanding of identity, regardless of their starting points? One interesting data point in the study was how students interpreted artifacts that constructed identity in falsely binary ways.

I've already mentioned one of the biggest offenders in reinforcing an unrealistic binary presentation of identity: the episode "Hathor" from the series *Stargate: SG-1*. The episode presents a view of gender and sexuality that relies on a false and essentialized version of male sexuality, which assumes all men will be duped by any sexual favor from any woman, and no man will listen to any woman's rational thought, only responding to her flaunting her body. It further presents a flat and fictitious representation of women as only powerful in terms of their sexual power. Finally, it creates a world where all individuals are heterosexual, an especially questionable scenario in light of the representation of women in the military.

Eve Sedgwick argues that binaries are producers of power. By first recognizing how media produces and reproduces such binaries, and then by critiquing those binaries, students are able to question and destabilize that power.

The episode of *Stargate: SG-1*, while being terrible, provided a space—an opening in the fantasy world—where students were able to interrogate the binary construction of gender and sexuality from a relatively safe position. Since the character of Hathor is a fictional goddess with more-than-human powers, students could analyze the message without having to identify too closely with the perpetrator of sexual power or the protagonists duped by her.

I found that students don't usually recognize their own privileged positions in society without some "priming" ahead of time. For most, if not all of my students, their privilege extends to the basic fact that they do not have to know or acknowledge their privilege to benefit from it, echoing Peggy McIntosh's concerns about unacknowledged privilege as she "unpacks the invisible knapsack" of white privilege. McIntosh discovered that for privileged students, discussing others' disadvantage was okay as long as it didn't cross over into the "taboo" of discussing one's own privilege (188). However, in addition to this taboo of discussing privilege, I also noted that students frequently didn't notice their own marginalized positions either. This was especially true for women, and to a lesser extent, for those from lower income classes. The fiction portrayed on television that the "war between the sexes" was over and women and men are equal was often accepted unquestioningly. I found this particularly notable when confronted with females in traditionally male-dominated fields like the sciences and engineering who attempted to explain away the male dominance with threadbare stereotypes like 'women aren't good at math'. I even had a female student majoring in Finance turn

in a rough draft of an early-in-the-semester paper with that idea as her thesis. Many of these notions are a result of what David Gauntlett refers to in *Media, Gender, and Identity* (a text I used in some of the classes) as “The *Cosmo* Factor.” Essentially, women are encouraged to assert their right to sexual pleasure and capitalism, while being misdirected with conflicting messages about body image, sexuality, and economics. As Gauntlett says, a “*Cosmo* girl might have owed a lot to feminism, but she was unlikely to identify with it” (57). Ideas about modern women are reproduced in media and accepted by viewers as Truth.

While I did not have the specific expectation that students would leave my class having become activists, one watermark of success for the television show analysis was whether or not students became more critical consumers of their own culture, especially of television shows that seemed to represent them as individuals. Although not all completed assignments revealed this one way or another, the student reflections on their own work as well as conversations I had with students did reveal that they were approaching media artifacts with a more critical eye. Some students even joked that I had “ruined” television for them. They could no longer watch television without considering how identity was being constructed. This was true for students from a variety of backgrounds. In her final semester reflection, Rachel wrote:

We’ve absorbed information and have been communicators since we have been born become accustomed [sic] to ‘taking in’ information. We have ‘learned’ to just accept what we’re told, what we see on television, in

magazines, and even on campus. In the Star Trek episode I watched for Assignment 4, there were many parallels to the importance of race. I'm sure if that this course wasn't about identity, and more about the genre of television show, I wouldn't have even thought of it as significant. . . I have definitely learned to watch all television more critically, because everything is planned and is subject to being rhetorically analyzed. (Rachel)

In her reflection, Rachel makes a point to acknowledge that the analysis of television was especially effective in her development of critical skills because it asked her to focus on identity specifically. While I can't know for certain what long term impact this may have, the short term outcome did demonstrate at least some acknowledgement of the ways in which the students occupy privileged positions in society.

As students gain awareness of their relative privilege, the question is what do they do with this position? To quote the character Dr. Malcolm in the film *Jurassic Park*: "Your scientists were so preoccupied with whether or not they could; they didn't stop to think if they should." Csicsery-Ronay said SF asks two important questions: "[H]ow plausible is the conceivable novum? . . . and . . . how good/bad/altogether different are the transformations that would issue from the novum?" (387) These questions are a feature of SF that become apparent to students whether they recognize the theoretical backdrop of ethics. Students recognize the presence of ethical dilemmas being wrestled with in the artifacts they watch even though they may not name them as such.

In the *ST: DS9* episode “Chimera,” for example, most students recognized that there was a conflict taking place between racially distinct groups and that the character Odo was in a difficult position because of his personal connection to both groups. Students recognized that he was emotionally distraught because both groups made demands on him to take action in opposition to the other. Since neither group was presented as completely right or completely wrong, the episode does not suggest an easy answer to the dilemma Odo must resolve. While student responses to the dénouement of the episode varied, most students recognized that Odo had to make a difficult choice and live with the consequences:

Odo feels conflicted because he can't follow his instincts [to shapeshift] because it's not conforming with his society's norms. (Rachel)

Odo is denying his true nature in order to fit in [and]. . . to be with his one true love, Kira. (Susie)

The question is, does this kind of complicated SF help create a more critical, self-aware population whose future will involve making decisions for themselves and others?

In “The *Polis* as Rhetorical Community,” Carolyn Miller argues that “The polis is a rhetorical community, then, because...it is the site of political debate between citizens, a locus of self-defining communal action. Because there are many citizens, there are differences; because there is one polis, they must confront those

differences" (239). By watching *ST: DS9*, students can confront racial differences from the safety of a fictional world.

If, as Miller argues, the polis is a rhetorical community, then the artifacts that represent that polis are rhetorical clues to how that community sees itself, as is the case with *Star Trek*. For our students, media is one of the most common and ubiquitous forms of communal representation. Through examinations of the conflicts present in the fictional worlds of these media, the viewers are able to wrestle with classically ethical dilemmas in contemporary ways. In numerous episodes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, for example, the audience is invited to see monsters as "the other" and then continuously challenged to accept them as a heterogeneous group not fitting a single definition of good or bad.

Presenting other identities as monsters is certainly nothing new in entertainment. Since the earliest fictional media, the monster represented that which deviated from the norm. This basic feature of SF has been central answering the question of whether or not SF aids post-secondary composition students in developing critical thinking around critical categories of identity. While all fiction to one degree or another represents otherness as monstrous, the overt way that SF does this has proven itself especially effective for the critical goals. While students weren't always able to see the false representation of otherness in conventional dramas, they usually identified it when the representation had fangs or was able to change into a fog bank.

In the essay “Cultural Studies, Public Pedagogy, and the Responsibility of Intellectuals” Henry Giroux argues that culture acts “as both a site of contestation and a site of utopian possibility, a space in which an emancipating politics can be fashioned” (60). As I read what students have written about representations of identity and society in the cultural artifacts that they analyzed, I see those contested and utopian sites manifested clearly in SF television.

CHAPTER 6

SOME CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE STUDY

Effectiveness of SF as a Pedagogical Tool

While this study is clearly not the end of the line in terms of understanding SF television as a tool for composition pedagogy, it did reveal some useful ideas for future work. First and foremost, the study did demonstrate conclusively that SF television was an effective tool for teaching college composition students about critical categories of identity. Since this was the primary hypotheses from which this study evolved, that fact alone justifies continued application and refinement of these pedagogical strategies.

Further, the study also demonstrated that SF television was more useful than other genres of television in developing an awareness of critical issues, in part, because its very nature encourages engagement with critical issues. The correlation between the level of fantasy and the students' ability to not view the show as an accurate representation of beliefs and attitudes demonstrated that the more fantastic the fantasy world, the easier it was for students to think and write critically about it.

The study also proved effective in teaching both composition and critical thinking to multiple levels of students from a variety of socio-political, cultural, and educational backgrounds. Using SF television in the classroom was effective in reaching a diverse group of students: It met the specific needs of the majority of

students without further marginalizing or ignoring the minority. SF television shows were especially effective in aiding student understanding of the composition concepts of thesis development and rhetorical analysis.

Although, the data presented and analyzed in the previous chapters demonstrates clearly that SF television was an effective teaching tool, the process of designing, implementing, and analyzing the pedagogy also revealed possible alternatives for this study and for future work in similar areas. Some of those possibilities are included in the following sections.

Possible Alternatives for Similar Projects

I noticed that one result of changing the assignment order of the rhetorical analysis and the documented essay in English 250 was that both assignments were stronger. Students were more willing and, frankly, had more time earlier in the semester to do the research necessary to write a successful documented essay. Since the issue of identity was consistent from one assignment to the next, the research they did early on provided them with a better framework for approaching the analysis. They were better educated on issues of identity before they attempted to critically analyze an artifact of popular culture. While this assignment ordering is not specific to the goals of this study on SF television, it is an important feature of the course in which the students participating in this study were enrolled.

It would be interesting to have students write a second documented research paper after the rhetorical analysis to see the kinds of improvements they would make. While revision is encouraged, a simple revision of the documented essay after the rhetorical analysis was completed might not be enough to see movement.

Interestingly, and frustratingly, despite the choices students were given for the shows—each semester had an offering of three or four SF shows and one drama—the majority of students chose the one drama. Even with the evidence that the SF options would make for easier and better analyses, students still chose the drama. Students frequently cited their familiarity with the show as motive for choosing dramas; they mistakenly believed it would be “easier” because they had seen it before. Additionally, SF has some sort of stigma associated with it that made students not choose it. One student acknowledged both of these were true when he confessed, “I chose [*CSI*] because I am most familiar with it, and I think I will find it easier to connect with because it is not science fiction.” Even more interesting was the fact that students who I would place as beginning in the less developed categories of movement were more likely to choose drama. This is thinly reinforced by the fact that of the small number of students identifying strongly with SF, half of them were in the honors section of English 250.

There have been a handful of scholarly studies (e.g. John Tenuto, Daryl G. Frasseti), which provide data correlating the level of education with SF fandom, as well as other demographics such as race and gender. I intentionally chose to omit

demographic information about the participants from this study because of the primary goal to make my SF pedagogy useful for all students regardless of background. However, it would be interesting to see how the demographic makeup of the viewers influenced their interpretation and analysis of the various SF artifacts.

Obviously, if I wanted to make the assignment more targeted, I wouldn't give students a drama option at all; however, for the purpose of this study I did want the comparison. I might also require the category of identity discussed in both the documented essay and the rhetorical analysis be the same.

The biggest downfall of the dramas is the students' tendency to conflate reality with fiction. Limiting the choices of shows to specific SF would go a long way in eliminating this tendency. Shows like *Stargate SG-1*, however, would still provide a challenge. Clearly emerging from this study was the fact that the closer the show's reality was to real life, the more difficulty students had in distinguishing between the two. The more fantastic the fantasy world, the easier it was for students to analyze.

Another issue that came up with this study, which I had not considered prior to the assignment design and presentation, was the age of students. Because they are technically adults, I did not anticipate them responding to some of the television shows as though they were antiques. It was interesting to read students' essays, which talked about the late 1990's as though it was a very long time ago. Television shows that I watched as an adult, like *Xena: Warrior Princess* and *Star*

Trek: Deep Space Nine, seemed ancient to students who were children or babies when they aired. Although I tried to provide more modern choices for students as the study progressed, I did not give students choices of television shows only from their own generation. The reasons for this are both pragmatic and pedagogical. First, it wasn't humanly possible for me to watch that much television so I could provide more alternatives. Second, I found that some distance was actually good for students, especially when it came to identifying issues of rhetorical context between the show and the socio-political issues of the day. It would be interesting, however, to see if SF artifacts contemporary to the students' age provided any key distinctions in the outcome of the study.

In recent years, acceptance of and interest in SF as a genre has created a less esoteric audience. There have been two recent film reboots (2009, 2013) of *Star Trek* spearheaded by director J. J. Abrams, as well as the recent selling of the *Star Wars* franchise by George Lucas to Disney Corporation, sparking rumors of many more *Star Wars* films to come. Both of these events have put SF into mainstream culture in a new, and potentially concerning way. It would be interesting to see if there is a connection to be made with my study and the new wave of SF.

Additional Notes about the Study

Some skeptics might argue that the student movement I document in this study could have occurred as a result of any well-taught composition class,

regardless of the SF television elements. For such skeptics, I should mention I have taught FYC courses that did not use SF television as part of the curriculum. This study did evolve in response to some frustrations I was having with finding useful ways to teach composition critically in those earlier classes. I do believe that student movement in key areas of critical thinking and composition were aided by SF; however, future work could address this criticism more specifically. Tracking movement through a comparison of student writing about SF television to student writing about something else (FYC courses that use the environment as a topic, for example) could be further evidence in support of the data presented in this study.

As I mentioned in Chapter Four, something surprising that emerged from the study was the students' relative comfort level in communicating about sexual orientation over the other categories, especially race. It would be interesting to dig into this area a bit more to see if this could be traced to specifics. I suspect increasing attention to sexual orientation both in media and in socio-political movements may be at the root of this.

Students who wrote about the original *Star Trek* series sometimes made specific connections to contextual issues of racial equality taking place in the 1960's which helped them to account for the progressive attitudes about race in the show, even in the face of some outdated attitudes about gender.

Finally, a note about grading: In an ideal educational environment, neither students nor instructors are concerned with grades. Like the ancient rhetors and their pupils, we could proceed with the process of learning by focusing on how

these lessons relate to the future functioning of our society without regard for whether the three credits will “count” for a degree. But, obviously, in contemporary academic institutions, this is not the case. Students are concerned with grades, sometimes disproportionately so. Students are frequently more concerned with how the mediocre grade they have received will impact their GPAs than in the fact that the grade was because they failed to meet some basic requirement of the assignment. Unfortunately, for many students, higher learning is about the degree at the end and not the process of getting an education.

I mention this issue of grading because it had an impact on this study. The difficulty in meeting some of the basic critical goals of this study were, in part, because students frequently had the expectation that meeting the minimum requirements for a given assignment would equal an A, regardless of their writing skill, creativity, or successful expression of ideas. This institutional barrier is not limited to English classes, but it is certainly more pronounced in courses that rely on the instructor’s subjective interpretation of the students’ work. Students who received C’s on earlier semester essays sometimes became disillusioned by their grades and ceased to make a whole-hearted effort later in the semester. It’s difficult to quantify students’ emotional disconnect when it comes to meeting the expectations for the course, but I wanted to note that this issue did have an impact on what students did in the course. I believe the success of the critical pedagogy of SF outlined in this study was hindered by the necessity of a concrete, graded evaluation of essays.

Evolution of Theory and Practice

As I consider the mass of data presented in Chapters Four and Five, and reflect on the many semesters spent working with students throughout the course of this study, I realize how much my own teaching praxis has evolved as a result. In considering how her own theories about critical pedagogy were impacted by implementing it in practice, Amy Lee notes:

While the literature in critical pedagogy provides useful and energizing accounts of how this theoretical framework should inform our teaching, it provides few representations of *how* our teaching might change in light of subscribing to this pedagogical vision. (72)

Throughout this study, I was working to uncover more useful ways of presenting critical materials to students, as well as revising my own understanding of the theories I was using as a foundation for the subject-matter I was attempting to present. Throughout the two and a half years that this study was taking place, I was continuing to find new and different ways to get students to engage with issues of identity as well as artifacts of SF and popular culture. Lee wonders: "How can we enact, and not simply imagine, a pedagogy that acknowledges and makes use of the ideology embedded within texts. . . ?" (Lee 73). I wonder this too. Throughout my time developing a critical pedagogy of SF television, frequently returned to the texts, looking for how I could make it useful for students.

Just like Lee and numerous other critical pedagogy scholars (e.g. Qualley, McComiskey, Berlin) I found that reflexivity and reflection on my own work was as necessary to making the pedagogy stronger and more effective as it was for making my students' writing more meaningful. Though I present the data and analysis in the preceding chapters as a final write-up of a completed study, the critical pedagogy is anything but. I continue to engage with popular culture and examine my own praxis in light of my continually evolving understanding of what it means to be, as Giroux says, a "cultural worker" with an ever-changing subject position. My hope for this study is that it suggests, not a singular way of approaching critical issues, but a trajectory for the future.

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"Chimera." *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*. Creators Rick Berman and Michael Pillar. Writer René Echevarria. Perf. Avery Brooks, René Auberjonois, Nana Visitor, J.G. Hertzler. Paramount Pictures, 1999. DVD.

"Cloud Minders, The." *Star Trek*. Creator Gene Roddenberry. Teleplay Margaret Armen. Perf. William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy, DeForest Kelley, Diana Ewing. Desilu Studios, NBC, 1969. DVD.

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"Hathor." *Stargate SG-1*. Creators Brad Wright and Jonathan Glassner. Writer Jonathan Glassner. Perfs. Richard Dean Anderson, Michael Shanks, Amanda Tapping, Christopher Judge, Suanne Braun. Showtime, 1997. DVD.

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Mickey Mouse Monopoly. Dir. Miguel Picker. Media Education Foundation, 2001. VHS.

"New Moon Rising." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Creator Joss Whedon. Writer Marti Noxon. Perf. Sarah Michelle Gellar, Alyson Hannigan, Nicholas Brendon, Seth Green, Amber Benson. WB Television Network, 2000. DVD.

"Our Mrs. Reynolds." *Firefly*. Creator and Writer Joss Whedon. Perfs. Nathan Fillion, Alan Tudyk, Gina Torres, Morena Baccarin, Christina Hendricks. 20th Century Fox, 2002. DVD.

"Rejoined." *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*. Creators Rick Berman and Michael Pillar. Teleplay René Echevarria and Ronald D. Moore. Perf. Avery Brooks, Terry Farrell, Rene Auberjonois, Nana Visitor, Susanna Thompson. Paramount Pictures, 1995. DVD.

Sarkeesian, Anita. "Feminist Frequency: Conversations with Popular Culture." 15 Feb 2012. FeministFrequency.com. Accessed 25 Feb 2012. Web.

"Sounds of Silence." *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*. Creator Anthony Zuiker. Writer Josh Berman and Andrew Lipsitz. Perf. William Peterson, Marg Helgenberger, Jorja Fox, Gary Dourdon, George Eads. CBS, 2001. DVD.

"Space Seed." *Star Trek*. Creator Gene Roddenberry. Teleplay Gene L. Coon. Perf. William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy, DeForest Kelley, Ricardo Montalban, Madlyn Rhue. Desliu Studios, NBC, 1967. DVD.

X-Files, The: I Want to Believe. Creator Chris Carter. Perfs. David Duchovny, Gillian Anderson. 20th Century Fox, 2008. DVD.

"XX." *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*. Creator Anthony Zuiker. Writer Ethlie Ann Vare. Perf. William Peterson, Marg Helgenberger, Jorja Fox, Gary Dourdon, George Eads, Diana Maria Riva. CBS, 2004.

APPENDIX A

ASSIGNMENT SHEETS

Summary

Assignment Overview

Frequently in academia, you will be required to summarize information. Often this summarizing is necessary as part of a larger project: collecting and analyzing data, writing a term paper, or creating an annotated bibliography (which you will do later in this course.) You will find that composing brief, concise summaries is a helpful asset in many courses and is an important skill to learn and polish early in your academic career. This assignment will help you with that goal and will be a stepping stone for later major assignments.

The major goal for this summary is to accurately and concisely restate the author's main points without inserting your own thoughts or opinions. The final summary will be a short paper of approximately 250 to 500 words (1 to 2 pages, double-spaced).

You will be using one of the articles from the following list for your summary. Review each one before you select the article you will summarize. All articles are available on Moodle.

Davis, James P. "Maxim and the Management of Contempt." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 38.6 (2005): 1011-21.

hooks, bell. "Mock Feminism: *Waiting to Exhale*." *Reel to Real*. New York: Routledge, 1996. 65-74.

Kellner, Douglas. "Rambo and Reagan." *Media Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1995. 62-75.

Writing the Summary

Planning the summary. First, **read your chosen essay carefully**, underlining important words and annotating the margins to mark key points. Before you compose, ask yourself: What order will work the best for my summary? Some authors may repeat themselves, circle around a point, or build up to a point; a summary needs to be succinct, and usually (but not always) the main idea is placed at the beginning of the summary.

Drafting the summary. The first sentence of your summary should **include the name of the essay, name of the author, and thesis of the essay**. Summarize and

paraphrase the important points that support the thesis. After you have composed the summary, ask yourself: Does it accurately identify the thesis of the essay and the central points that support the thesis?

Revising the summary. Return to the essay to **make sure your summary is accurate, is written in your own words, and connects ideas smoothly**. If your summary is too long, try to eliminate secondary points or reduce wordiness. If your summary is too short, explain in more detail a major point.

Some common mistakes when composing a summary include: not reading the essay carefully, not including the author, title, or main point(s), inserting opinions or judgments, incorrectly citing information, and making the summary too long.

Remember, a summary of someone else's work concisely conveys the thesis and main points of the essay. It does not include your personal opinion on the topic nor does it judge the merit of the composition. Most of the summary should be a paraphrase of the essay, and any quotations should be brief, accurate, and correctly punctuated and cited. We will review citation guidelines and practice summarizing in class so don't forget to include a works cited entry at the end of the summary.

Evaluation Criteria

In addition to meeting the basic requirements specified in this assignment sheet, the summary should:

Context

- Identify and restate the thesis and main points of the document
- identify the author and title

Substance

- include the author's ideas or examples but not your personal opinions
- avoid judgments about the document itself
- accurately paraphrase the author's ideas without relying heavily on quotes

Organization

- read smoothly and be easy to follow
- transition well between ideas and paragraphs

Style

- avoid errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling

Delivery

- include a bibliographic entry
- include correct citation of all quotes and paraphrases

The following rubric will be used to evaluate your final draft.

[illegible]

Documented Essay

The Assignment

In this course we have discussed the idea that all communication is persuasive—everything is an argument. In our day-to-day lives we are inundated with numerous sources of information; it is our job to think critically about how information is presented and packaged for us rather than to passively accept information as “neutral.” Information is rarely neutral—it often has a “slant.” This doesn’t make it useless, but it does mean we must be critical consumers of the information we are presented. **Assignment 2 will ask you to critically analyze multiple sources of information on an issue of your choice in order to create a persuasive argument in the form of a documented essay that examines multiple perspectives.**

The genre of the documented essay is a common one in college; it incorporates numerous communication skills, including summarizing, arguing, and researching; knowing how to construct a thoughtful, persuasive, and measured argument is an invaluable skill that will serve you well in the rest of your academic career, as well as in your professional and personal life.

Your final essay will be an argument based on a thesis (debatable claim) that you support using research. It will be a minimum of 1,000 words (5 pages) plus visuals and a Works Cited page. The final paper should do three major things:

1. Demonstrate thorough and careful academic research
2. Present multiple perspectives on an issue
3. Present and support a specific argument (thesis)

The Process

The assignment will be produced in stages with each step building on the last to allow you to develop a strong final essay. This assignment will be the largest of the semester and is set up this way to allow you to develop a process for successful communication.

You will begin as a group to **brainstorm issues that fit into a specific topic and will work collaboratively to do research to refine a specific issue** each of you will discuss. Since you will be including multiple perspectives in your final paper, working with each other will be essential to your uncovering information. Group members may not agree; however, discussing opposing ideas will be useful.

As you conduct your research, each group member will **create an annotated bibliography** (a separate assignment) of your sources to help guide your specific ideas and help you generate a thesis. Instructions for this annotated bibliography will be presented in a separate worksheet.

Each group member will then **submit a working thesis** to the instructor that details the position that he or she plans on advocating in the individual research paper. Even though your group will decide on an issue and conduct research together, your individual thesis idea and corresponding persuasive research papers will be your own. It is not necessary that the group members share similar perspectives on the issue, only that individual group member's values and ideas are treated with respect and consideration.

While this is the longest paper of the semester, you will need to narrow your focus. You simply can't address every aspect of a large, complex issue in a five page paper. The most successful persuasive research papers will tackle a specific, narrow, and debatable issue; however, you should still easily be able to fill five pages on a narrowed topic.

You must use at least four sources for your essay. If you use sources on the Internet or from texts we have not read as a class, you must attach a photocopy of these materials to your essay. **Three of the four sources need to be academic sources, meaning either a book, journal article, or article from a reputable magazine. You may include a maximum of only one website as a source.** You may not use a paper or portion of a paper that you or another student wrote for another course.

Visual Support

You must incorporate at least one visual into your essay that supports the message communicated by verbal information. The visual must have a caption and be referred to in the body of the essay. The image source needs to be cited and listed on your Works Cited page. Keep in mind a visual should add to your argument, not simply be a "tacked-on" image. Good choices include data displays like graphs, photos that evoke pathos, or technical illustrations. Poor choices include clip art that is only topically related or generic photographs of people.

Documentation

You **MUST** document your sources in this essay both in-text and with a works cited page. Please take care in choosing sources. Some sources, such as Wikipedia, are **NOT ACCEPTABLE** in an academic paper of this type. We will spend time in class on documentation and using sources.

Be careful not to plagiarize. If you use exact words from a source, be sure to use quotation marks, in-text citations, and a Works Cited page. Also, check to see that

you haven't used too many quotations in the paper; paraphrase the information instead. Paraphrased information also requires in-text citations.

Evaluation criteria

In addition to having addressing the major issues expressed in this assignment sheet, your documented essay should do the following:

Context

- The lead paragraph identifies the thesis (debatable claim) you will argue
- The introduction establishes interest for the reader

Substance

- The essay focuses on the specific issue and delivers relevant information
- The essay contains material from a useful, interesting, and academic range of sources
- The essay fairly and accurately presents multiple perspectives

Organization

- The essay is organized clearly around key points that support the focus.
- The essay uses transitions and repetition of key ideas to guide your readers' attention.
- The essay contains a strong introduction and a logical conclusion.

Style

- The essay includes appropriate summarized information, quotations, and paraphrases
- The essay correctly cites sources, both in-text and in the works cited.
- Problems with grammar and mechanics do not distract or undermine your readers' confidence.

Delivery

- Layout, formatting and type choice make the essay easy to read.
- Visual material is appropriately integrated and adds to the communication

The following rubric will be used to evaluate your essay:

[illegible]

Rhetorical Analysis of Television

Assignment Overview

Since much of our understanding about identity— race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ability, culture, etc.—comes from this popular medium, analyzing TV shows more closely can lend valuable insight into how our understanding of different groups is shaped or affirmed. Your goal for this assignment is to rhetorically analyze a television show's portrayal of one or more categories of identity and how those portrayals function within culture. The final analysis will be an essay of 800 – 1000 words (4-5 pages) and will include at least two relevant visuals.

Completing the Assignment

This is a rhetorical analysis so you will need to discuss audience, purpose, and context of the show as it relates to the category of identity. Also, you will need to focus your analysis in some way. For example, you could choose to discuss a particular character, a relationship between two characters, a way in which the show regularly depicts a certain group or situation, the show's main premise, etc. The main goal of your analysis should be to look critically at the messages (both overt and hidden) that the show sends in regards to the category and how those messages are functioning within the show itself and in the culture overall.

This assignment will be completed in four stages:

1. Electronic proposal to professor containing your choice of show and the rationale for your choice (submitted via email)
 2. A typed thesis statement for your essay (prepared for your individual conference time)
 3. A peer review of a working draft (review completed in class)
 4. A final draft of the essay
- All stages must be completed to receive full credit for the assignment. You will receive feedback from your instructor on your email proposal and your thesis statement.

For the first stage of the assignment, you will compose a **formal email proposal** to your professor including the following information:

- The show (both show title and episode name) you propose for analysis
- The category of identity you will examine for the show and the direction you see your analysis going
- The rationale for your choices—why is this worthy of analysis?
- Appropriate business emailing conventions and information

Some critical questions to ask as you analyze the show:

- Are the depictions of the critical categories realistic or stereotypical? How?
- Are these depictions harmful? Useful? How? Why?
- Are images, ideas, and language in society being shaped or affirmed by the depictions you see on TV? How? Give examples.
- Do you see any mixed messages being presented? If so, explain.
- Why might the producers/writers/studios/etc. want to present the characters and situations the way they do?

Choosing a Show for Analysis

Select one of the shows from the following list for your analysis. All shows are on reserve at the Parks Library. [Shows change from semester to semester.]

"Chimera" Star Trek: Deep Space Nine

"Getting Off" CSI: Crime Scene Investigation

"Hathor" Stargate SG-1

"New Moon Rising" Buffy the Vampire Slayer

"Our Mrs. Reynolds" Firefly.

"Space Seed" Star Trek

Evaluation Criteria

In addition to meeting the basic requirements listed on this assignment sheet, your essay should:

Context

- Include information on intended audience, purpose, and context of the show
- Contain a thesis focused on an analysis of the TV show and the category of identity
- Contain a conclusion about the depictions of the category based on your analysis

Substance

- Contain specific, detailed descriptions of the characters and situations that are relevant to your analysis
- Contain connections between the descriptions and the category, which comprise an interesting and relevant analysis

Organization

- Be organized into appropriate paragraphs
- Follow a logical order that includes your descriptions, analyses, and conclusions
- Use transition words and phrases to effectively communicate your ideas

Style

- Use appropriate vocabulary and expression
- Be free of spelling, grammar, and mechanical errors
- Use appropriate citations

Delivery

- Consider design and layout decisions with regard to medium
- Appropriately integrate visual elements

[illegible]

Archetype Analysis

Assignment Overview

Most genres of entertainment rely on the audience's understanding of archetypes to "fill in" the background information on the characters. Often these archetypes draw upon stereotypes and flat descriptions that represent cultural conglomerations rather than real people. Understanding how these archetypes function in a film can help us understand underlying cultural attitudes and assumptions about a variety of people.

For this assignment, you will select a film from the list and present an analysis of the characters in the film. Your analysis should describe the characters and explain how those characters fit pre-existing tropes, archetypes, or stereotypes. While you do not need to analyze every single character shown in the film, your analysis should explore a variety of characters that are presented—1-2 main characters, 2-3 supporting characters, and 1-2 background characters. Your final analysis should be a paper of around 600-800 words (3-4 pages double-spaced not including visuals.) Include a relevant visual of each character you describe and format your essay properly.

Completing the Assignment

Since you are analyzing characters, you won't need to do much plot summary unless it is important to understanding your character analysis. You may, however, want to discuss the character at the beginning and end of the film if there is a significant development that occurs as a result of the plot's unfolding. Some characters may not develop, others may change completely or even die, which could be very important to your analysis. You will want to give your readers enough descriptive information about the character, both physically and mentally (perhaps even emotionally or spiritually) so they can understand the points you are making and will want to explain clearly how each character fits a specific archetype.

While your final essay will not be an argument in the traditional sense, your analysis of each character should make coherent sense and all analyses should flow together logically.

Choosing a Film for Analysis

Refer to the list below for films you may analyze. These particular films and their genres have been chosen to aid you in a character analysis. If you have a suggestion for another film that deviates from this list, speak to your instructor before proceeding.

Superman, Spiderman, Batman, Avatar, Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, Planet of the Apes, Conan, Pirates of the Caribbean, Indiana Jones, Inception, The Bourne Identity, Gladiator, The Karate Kid, The Matrix, Clash of the Titans, The Mummy, I Robot, Pitch Black/Chronicles of Riddick, Rocky, Die Hard

There are many films available for check-out at the Parks Library and the Ames Library and are easily available through free commercial outlets such as Hulu.com as well as membership sites like Netflix. Some of you may have DVDs of these, which you can use and/or share with classmates.

Evaluation Criteria

The following rubric will be used to evaluate this assignment.

Archetype Analysis	Context		Substance		Organization		Style	Delivery	
	Sufficient number of characters	Accuracy of character archetypes	Sufficient details and examples	Interesting, relevant discussion	Introduction, transitions, conclusion	Logical flow of ideas	Spelling, grammar, mechanics	Relevant visuals	Page format, layout
	Exemplary								
	Mature								
	Competent								
	Developing								
	Beginning								
	Basic								

Final Portfolio

Overview

Throughout the semester you have explored how language creates meaning and have uncovered how that meaning can create power, both personally and institutionally. For your final portfolio, you have a chance to reflect on what you have learned about language and power this semester by thoroughly revising one of your major written assignments, by composing short reflections on the other four major assignments, and by composing a final essay reflecting on your growth as a communicator throughout the semester.

Your portfolio will include the following eleven items:

1. The original, graded assignment #4 with instructor comments
2. The revision of assignment #4
- 3 – 6. An artifact to represent each of the other four major assignments
- 7 – 10. A brief reflective essay on each of those other four major assignments
11. Final reflective essay on the semester to be completed during the final exam time

Revising Your Essay: Planning, Drafting, and Editing

Revision here means more than editing: It means “re-seeing” the subject. As such, you should plan on including additional material, reorganizing your thoughts, and doing some new composing. Your original assignment, then, will be a springboard for your revision.

As you begin this assignment, look over your original assignments as well as the comments on them. Which areas need the most improvement? Where can you offer additional development or clarification? Where can you offer more introspection or a deeper discussion, analysis, or significant detail? Have you changed your mind about anything that you discussed in the original assignment? Do any of the instructor comments match feedback you received on your peer review? Do you need additional source material to support your work?

Once you’ve spent some time rethinking your subject, set aside the original assignment and begin writing down some new ideas that may have come to you since your first draft. See if you need to collect more data. Be careful not to dig a hole for yourself by getting stuck in the phrasing and editing of your original assignment; remember this is a re-envisioning, not merely editing.

After you have revised your essay, check your paragraphs for topic sentences, edit each sentence carefully, and evaluate the effectiveness of each word choice. The paper you finally submit should synthesize the writing and thinking skills you have

developed throughout the term, so you should take care in constructing your final draft.

Writing a Reflection for Your Assignments

Throughout the semester, your instructor and your peers (and possibly others) have given you feedback on your course projects to help you better achieve your communications goals. Use this feedback and the knowledge you have gained throughout the semester to **compose a brief reflection on each assignment, discussing your composition process, the areas you would concentrate on if you were to revise the project, and/or any other ideas you had as you were working on the project.** Plan on writing at least one page for each assignment and give specific details about your project—don't use generalizations like "I would revise the organization;" instead, provide specific details about the organization that you would change. For any group projects you did, you can discuss the whole project but try to focus on your part of it.

Planning for Your Final Reflective Essay

For the final portion of the course, you will compose an essay reflecting on the semester as a whole. This essay will give you a chance to demonstrate what you have learned about strong communication throughout the semester both by modeling it in the final essay as well as making it the topic of the essay. Because of that, you will want to plan ahead to ensure your essay contains the basics of good communication—a strong introduction, a thesis idea, relevant details, an interesting conclusion, etc. A worksheet is included with this assignment sheet to help you get started with brainstorming what you might write about in your final. **You need not and should not use all (or any) of the ideas in the worksheet.** You want to develop a cohesive thesis; the worksheet is simply a place to start.

The final portfolio will be due during the final exam time scheduled by the university. You will not be excused from this exam time; you must come to the exam and turn in your final then.

Packaging Your Portfolio

Use either two-pocket folders or thin report-type covers to assemble your portfolio. Please do not use three-ring binders. **(This is a logistical issue for your instructor; she has extra folders if you need them; ask before you buy.)**

Use care when assembling your materials and think about logical organization of the items you include. A table of contents page can be a helpful way to collect the materials and make it easy for your instructor to understand your packaging. Keep in mind delivery is an important part of communication and your ethos can be judged as much on the packaging as on the messages contained within.

As noted earlier, you will need to include some type of artifact for each of the major assignments in addition to the essay you are revising. For written documents, simply use the original, graded paper. For the visual argument you could include the original project, depending on the size and format, or you could have something reduced or printed out to represent it. For example, if your visual was a video, you could print a still image from the video. For the oral presentation, you could include a storyboard printout of the PowerPoint you used, or you could include your

outline or note cards. For all of the assignments, include the instructor's original written comments.

Evaluation Criteria for the Revision and Reflection

In addition to meeting the requirements of the original assignment, the revised essay should:

Context

- demonstrate a thorough rethinking of the subject
- clarify the thesis or argument you're making

Substance

- contain additional material relevant to the thesis and/or the goals of the assignment
- be edited to remove irrelevant information and to improve visual information

Organization

- be reorganized to aid clarity and understanding
- contain a strong introduction, transitions, and conclusion

Style

- be free of spelling and grammar errors
- be revised to enhance the style and expression of the writing

Delivery

- include appropriately integrated supporting materials (e.g. visuals, works cited)

The final reflective essay should:

Context

- Contain a framing thesis idea

Substance

- Contain relevant details from your own writing process which illustrate your thesis

Organization

- Contain an introduction, transitions, and a conclusion

Style

- Be free of grammar and mechanical issues
- Contain clear and sophisticated expression (HINT: Don't say "many things.")

Delivery

- Be in an appropriate essay format

Evaluation Rubric for the Portfolio

Component	Exemplary	Mature	Competent	Developing	Beginning	Basic	Missing
Original essay #4 with instructor comments	Included			Partial			Missing
Revision of essay #4							
Context							
Substance							
Organization							
Style							
Delivery							
Final Reflective Essay							
Context							
Substance							
Organization							
Style							
Delivery							
Artifacts for five major assignments							
#1	Included			Partial			Missing
#2	Included			Partial			Missing
#3	Included			Partial			Missing
#5	Included			Partial			Missing
Reflections for four major assignments							
#1							
#2							
#3							
#5							
Packaged with care and attention to detail							

Final Reflective Essay Worksheet

Your final portfolio will include a reflective piece of writing. While this is not a “final exam” as such, it will be your final formal written piece. The following worksheet can be used to help guide and organize your thoughts for the final written reflection.

Your essay should not address every single one of the following questions; your final reflection should be a tightly focused essay. As such, it should be well thought-out, contain a thesis, be organized, include specific details and examples, and be edited for correctness. You may also use any additional ideas you have as a starting point—you’re not limited to these questions.

Questions to help guide you to a framing thesis idea for the final reflection:

How has your critical thinking on _____ changed as a result of this course?

What have you discovered about language, power, and/or identity this semester?

What have you learned about the various genres of media, literature, and/or writing we’ve worked with this semester?

What have you learned about yourself as a communicator over the course of the semester?

How has your composition process become more sophisticated since you began the course?

Discuss a specific assignment in terms of your thinking and learning process.

What have you learned about generating ideas for pieces you’re composing, as well as the details and explanations needed to develop and support those ideas?

What have you learned about the revision process, including proposals, thesis generation, peer reviews, and multiple drafts?

Which of your composing habits have remained the same during this semester and why? Which have changed and why?

How do you envision applying what you’ve learned in English 250 to future communications across disciplines? (Perhaps you’ve done so already.)

APPENDIX B

DATA COLLECTION DOCUMENTS

Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: Using Speculative Fiction Media for Communication About Critical Categories of Identity

Primary Investigator: Dawn Eystone

Secondary Contact: Susan Pagnac **Supervising Faculty:** Barbara Blakely

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine student communication projects (written, oral, visual, and electronic) to see if the genre of speculative fiction (SF) in multi-media is especially useful in helping students explore issues related to critical categories of identity, such as race, class, gender, and sexual orientation.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate, in addition to regular course assignments you will be asked to complete several research questionnaires throughout the semester. Your participation in the study will have no impact on your final grade in the course and you will complete the course assignments and questionnaires with your classmates regardless of your participation in the study.

Assignments will be completed according to the assignment guidelines and course policies for the course. The questionnaires will be for the research only and will ask you general questions about your experiences with the assignments and course materials and your learning process. Questionnaires will be conducted during class time but will not be part of your final course grade and you will be notified at the time the questionnaires are given that these are for the research study and not graded assignments. Your participation in the study will last for the duration of the semester.

If you agree to participate, you may also be asked to meet in-person for an interview with the primary investigator to follow-up on the answers you provided on written questionnaires and to elaborate on your written course materials and thought processes. Interviewees will meet at least once with the primary

investigator and may be invited to meet multiple times if time constraints make multiple sessions necessary or if the subject-matter merits ongoing dialogue. Interviews will be scheduled via email according to what is convenient for both parties and some interviews will be conducted after the semester ends. Interviews will not be recorded.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks to participants. All questionnaires will be given during regular class time. All interviews will be conducted in a neutral public space.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there may be no direct benefit to you; however, you will be able to provide feedback for making future assignments better. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by helping instructors find more effective ways to allow students to engage with and learn about critical categories of identity. Students participating in the study will have the opportunity to provide insight into problems related to how they have learned in the past and future students will benefit from the improved instructional strategies.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

This study will have no impact on your course grade. You will not have any costs from participating in this study and will not be financially compensated for participating in this study; however, the interviewer will provide you with a light meal during any out-of-class interviews.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. You may also decline to answer any questions you wish and may terminate any interviews at any time.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

At no time will you be recorded by any audio or video technology. All participants will be referred to by a pseudonym. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information about the study, contact:

Dawn Eyestone at eyestone@iastate.edu or Dr. Barbara Blakely at blakely@iastate.edu.

If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

.....

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

Please check whether or not you agree to participate. You must be 18 years of age to participate. Your signature indicates that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, that your questions have been satisfactorily answered, and you are at least 18 years of age. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant's Name (printed) _____

(Participant's Signature)

(Date)

_____ I **AGREE** to participate.

_____ I **DO NOT WISH** to participate.

Student Questionnaires

Beginning Semester Questionnaire for Speculative Media Research Project

When answering the following questions, keep in mind that speculative fiction in this context can include **science fiction, fantasy, horror, supernatural, mythical, alternative history**, and the like. Critical categories of identity include (but are not limited to) **race, socioeconomic class, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, culture, and religion**.

1. What knowledge or experience do you have with the genre of speculative fiction? Be specific. What books have you read? What films or television shows have you seen? What other SF materials have you encountered?
2. What do you think of speculative fiction? Do you think it is valuable, interesting, boring, useful, entertaining, nerdy, etc.? Give your honest opinion.
3. If you have little to no experience with SF, what do you think the consequences of using it in an academic setting might be? Why? If you have experience with SF, have you ever considered using it in a classroom setting? How?
4. What do you know about critical categories of identity? Have you studied these before, in or out of an academic setting? Be specific.

Mid-Semester Questionnaire for Speculative Media Research Project

When answering the following questions, keep in mind that speculative fiction in this context can include **science fiction, fantasy, horror, supernatural, mythical, alternative history**, and the like. Critical categories of identity include (but are not limited to) **race, socioeconomic class, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, culture, and religion**. Use the back of this sheet if you need more room to write.

1. When you made the choice of show for your TV analysis project, why did you make the decision to use the show that you did? (Be specific about the show you chose and why you wanted to use it more than the other options.)
2. Discuss why you did not choose the episode of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* for the TV analysis project. What about that show made it seem like a poor choice for this assignment?
3. How has your understanding of speculative fiction changed since the start of the semester? If it has not changed significantly, discuss why you think that is.
4. What have you learned about critical categories of identity since the beginning of this course? Has your thinking changed? Be specific.

End of Semester Questionnaire for Speculative Media Research Project

When answering the following questions, keep in mind that speculative fiction in this context can include **science fiction, fantasy, horror, supernatural, mythical, alternative history**, and the like. Critical categories of identity include (but are not limited to) **race, socioeconomic class, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, culture, and religion**. Use the back of this sheet if you need more room to write.

1. How has your understanding of critical categories of identity changed since the start of this assignment? Has your thinking changed? Be specific.
2. Over the course of the semester, discuss how your thinking has changed about speculative fiction. If it has not changed significantly, discuss why you think that is.
3. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of SF in relationship to the course assignments you completed this semester. Give details from your projects and be specific. Do you think SF was helpful in your understanding of critical categories of identity? Why or why not?
4. Do you have any other thoughts or comments about the course in relationship to SF or critical categories of identity that you would like to share?

APPENDIX C

IN-CLASS MATERIALS

Documented Essay Groups and Beginning Research Questions

Race

Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory

Questions: What is institutional racism? What is colorblindness? Why are these issues important to understanding racism in a contemporary society?

Socioeconomic Class

Theoretical Framework: Marxism

Questions: How is class defined? Why is it important to think of class as much more than a financial status? How does class connect to race? Gender?

Gender

Theoretical Framework: Feminism(s)

Questions: How is sex different from gender? Why is this distinction important? What are "waves" of feminism? Who benefits from gender equality?

Sexual Orientation

Theoretical Framework: Queer Theory

Questions: How is queer theory different from gay and lesbian studies? What does heteronormativity mean? What are binaries? Why are these things important?

Ability

Theoretical Framework: Disability Studies

Questions: What does it mean to be differently abled? How do medical science and individual experiences with disability connect and/or diverge?

Culture

Theoretical Framework: Post-Colonialism

Questions: How is culture defined? What is a subaltern? What are some lasting effects of colonization? Why are these effects important to consider?

Sample Claims for Analysis Using Toulmin Model

Race:

Claim: Affirmative action programs should be abolished because race should not be a factor in choosing people.

Socio-Economic Class:

Claim: Problems lower class people face can be solved through education.

Gender:

Claim: Although it wasn't always true, women nowadays have the same job opportunities as men.

Sexual Orientation:

Claim: Homosexuals deserve the right to marry, just like straight people.

Physical Ability:

Claim: Autistic children can be helped with better research and understanding.

Culture of Origin:

Claim: Society needs to recognize that illegal immigration laws are not successful.

Theoretical Frameworks in Cultural Studies Handout

Feminisms

It is difficult to define feminism simply since there are many types of feminist thought. Often referred to by its “waves,” feminism has branched into many forms since “first-wave” feminists in the mid-nineteenth century began demanding fair treatment and suffrage for women. Often, the term feminist evokes the image of a 1970’s “second-wave,” bra-burning radical lesbian demanding an end to patriarchy; however, this view is simplified and dated.

In the early 1990’s in the USA, third-wave feminism began as a response to perceived failures of the second wave and to the backlash against initiatives and movements created by the second wave. Third-wave feminism seeks to challenge or avoid essentialist definitions of femininity, which over-emphasize the experiences of upper middle-class white women. Third-wave feminists often focus on “micro-politics” and challenge the second wave’s paradigm as to what is, or is not, good for all women. Similarly, post-feminists (who are not “anti-feminist”) believe that women have achieved second wave goals and argue for a more complicated articulation of gender and equality within a postmodern world; thus, they tend to use post-structuralist (and often “queer”) interpretations of gender and sexuality.

Queer Theory

The use of the term “queer” in queer theory is not an indicator of a specific sexual orientation, so much as a critique of any normative view of identity. Major aspects of this critique include discussions of the role of performance in establishing and maintaining identity; examinations of sexuality and gender not as natural or essential, but as socially constructed; the way that these identities change or resist change; how identities can be in conflict within individuals and seemingly homogeneous groups; and power relationships within a heteronormative society.

Marxism

Karl Marx argued that “The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so...the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it.”

The mass media are, in classical Marxist terms, a ‘means of production’ in which the ruling class in capitalist society is the one that has ownership of the media. According to the classical Marxist position, the mass media simply disseminate the ideas and world views of the ruling class, and deny or defuse alternative ideas. In this theory, the mass media function to produce ‘false consciousness’ in the working-classes—monolithic expressions of ruling class values— which ignore any diversity of values or the possibility of oppositional readings by audiences.

Critical Race Theory

Although Critical Race Theory integrates multiple other concepts, a central stance it incorporates is opposition to contemporary idea of “color-blindness,” which undercuts the legal and political foundation of integration and affirmative action. For example, many Americans who advocate a merit-based, race-free (color-blind) worldview do not acknowledge the systems of privilege which benefit them. For example, many Americans rely on a social and sometimes even financial inheritance from previous generations, one that privileges whiteness and is unlikely to be forthcoming if one's ancestors were slaves.

This theory asserts that color blindness allows people to ignore the racial construction of whiteness, and reinforces its privileged and oppressive position. In colorblind situations, whiteness remains the normal standard, and blackness remains different, or marginal. As a result, white people are able to dominate when a color blind approach is applied because the common experiences are defined in terms which white people can more easily relate to than blacks. Insistence on no reference to race means black people can no longer point out the racism they face.

Color-blindness operates under the assumption that we are living in a world that is “post-race”—a world where race no longer matters—when in fact it is still a prevalent issue. While it is true that overt racism is rare today, its existence now tends to be covert and institutional.

Post-Colonialism

Post-colonialism is a specifically postmodern intellectual discourse that consists of reactions to, and analysis of, the cultural legacy of colonialism. The ultimate goal of post-colonialism is accounting for and combating the residual effects of colonialism on cultures. It is not simply concerned with salvaging past worlds, but learning how the world can move beyond this period together, towards a place of mutual respect.

Post-colonialist thinkers recognize that many of the assumptions which underlie the “logic” of colonialism are still active forces today. Exposing and deconstructing the racist, imperialist nature of these assumptions will remove their power of persuasion and coercion.

A key goal of post-colonial theorists is clearing space for multiple voices. This is especially true of those voices that have been previously silenced by dominant ideologies, also called subalterns. The critical nature of postcolonial theory entails destabilizing Western ways of thinking, therefore creating space for the subaltern, or marginalized groups, to speak and produce alternatives to dominant discourse.

Archetypes Handout

Archetypes in Literature

Psychologist Carl Jung called archetypes elements a kind of “collective unconscious” of the human race, prototypes rather than something gained from experience. The word is derived from the Greek: *arche*, original, and *typos*, form or model; thus, character are based on an *original model*. Fiction often uses these archetypes as “shorthand” to fill in the blanks when lengthy back stories are too cumbersome.

Examples of Archetypes

Characters:

Hero
Mother figure
Teacher/mentor
The innocent
Underdog
Double
Helping Animals
The Sacrificial Redeemer
Scapegoat/Sacrificial Victim
Enchantress/Temptress
The Monster/Ogre/Giant
Villain
Trickster
Evil figure

Settings:

Garden
Forest
Tree
Caves and tunnels
Mountains and peaks
The River
The Sea
Fountain
Islands

Actions/Events:

Journey or Quest
Rites of Initiation
Parental Conflict and Relationships
Coming of Age
Sleep/Dreaming
Sacrificial rites
The Test or Trial
Birth/Death and Rebirth
The Fall: Expulsion from Eden
Annihilation/Absurdity/Total
Oblivion

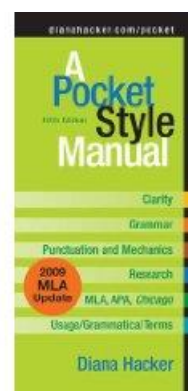
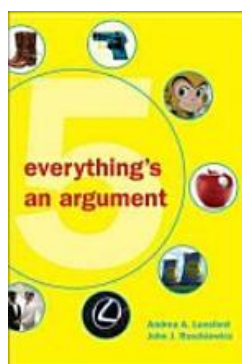
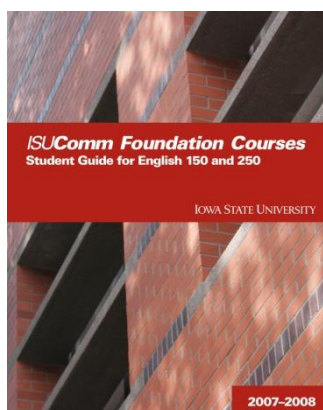
APPENDIX D

COURSE OVERVIEWS AND SYLLABI

Course Policies for English 250

Thinking and Writing About Identity in Popular Media**Instructor:** Dawn Eyestone**Email:** eyestone@iastate.edu**Office:** 457 Ross;**Office Hours:** TR 2:00 - 3:30**Moodle Website:** <http://courses.isucomm.iastate.edu/>**Textbooks and Materials***Student Guide: English 150 and 250*, Iowa State University, Department of English, 2012–2013.*Hacker, Diana. A Pocket Style Manual, 5th Edition. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009.**Lunsford, Andrea A., and John J. Ruszkiewicz. Everything's an Argument, 5th ed.**Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007.*

Access to the course website (the Moodle) will also be required for additional readings and coursework.

**Objectives**

The goals of English 250 are for you to develop skills in written, oral, visual, and electronic communication. As a result, you should become not only a more perceptive consumer of information, but also a communicator better able to make effective decisions in your own academic life and work.

This course will focus on identity and popular culture as they come together to construct reality through the use of language as a tool for argument. In this context,

argument means more than simply stating an opinion; arguments can be much harder to detect and much more entrenched in culture and language. This course will explore the nuances of popular culture that create our reality and influence our understanding of identity.

Assignments

In addition to major assignments, there will be shorter assignments, which you should keep in a flat pocket folder. Shorter assignments serve different purposes: to plan or revise a major assignment, to practice strategies important to a major assignment, to examine issues relevant to a major assignment, or to explore visual communication. Therefore, failure to complete the smaller assignments on time may result in a lowered grade for a major assignment. Shorter assignments may not be accepted if turned in late. **There will be no extra credit assignments.**

All work completed outside of class should be typed. Make sure you have a backup copy of all work before you turn it in to be graded. **Major essays will be penalized one grade (e.g., from B to B-) for each class period they are late.**

Class Attendance and Participation

Classes are in a discussion/workshop format; therefore, regular attendance and active, productive, and courteous participation with classmates and the instructor are important.

- **Missing more than three classes will lower your final grade in the course, and excessive absences (more than seven) will result in a failing grade for the course.** *Emergencies and major illnesses will be evaluated on a case by case basis; however, even with a valid reason to miss, you may have so many absences in a semester that your work and classroom experience are too compromised for you to remain in the class.* You will be advised by the course instructor and/or the Director of ISUComm Foundation Courses if your absences are too numerous for you to remain in English 250 and whether you need to drop the class and take it in a semester when your schedule permits regular attendance.
- If you are more than 15 minutes late to class, you will be counted absent.
- Missing during group work means taking a zero for that activity, as group activities cannot be made up individually. Minor in-class assignments cannot be made up but some can be scheduled in advance; if you know you are going to be absent check to see if this is an option.
- Class will occasionally be cancelled for conferences in my office. Missing a scheduled individual or group conference counts as an absence.

Grading and Evaluation

Unit	Assignment
Value	
Unit 1:	Summarizing
	Summary: (Assn. #1) 10%
Unit 2:	Researching and Creating Persuasive Arguments
	Annotated Bibliography (for Assn. #2) 5%
	Documented Essay (Assn. #2) 15%
	Group Oral PowerPoint Presentation (Assn. #3) 10%
Unit 3:	Analyzing Arguments Rhetorically
	Rhetorical Analysis (Assn. #4) 20%
Unit 4:	Creating Visual Arguments
	Visual Argument and Analysis (Assn. #5) 15%
Unit 5:	Revising and Reflecting
	Portfolio with Revisions and Reflection (Assn. #6) 10%
Other Coursework	
	Midterm Exam on Readings and Concepts 5%
	Shorter Assignments (Homework, Quizzes, etc.) 5%
	Participation (In-Class Discussion, Group Work, etc.) 5%

Specific information on grading of major assignments (e.g. what makes an A paper) can be found in the *Student's Guide: English 150 and 250* and on the specific assignment sheets.

Shorter assignments will be graded using whole letter grades: A, B, C, D, or F. All shorter assignment grades will be averaged together for the final shorter assignment grade.

Classroom Behavior

This course values multiple perspectives. Opinions and classroom discussions are highly encouraged; however, you are expected to act respectfully at all times to each other and to the instructor. The classroom should be a safe place to explore ideas. Hate speech of any kind will not be tolerated.

Academic Dishonesty

Thoroughly acquaint yourself with the material in *Student's Guide: English 150 and 250*, especially the section regarding ethics and plagiarism in the academy.

Understanding what constitutes plagiarism and academic dishonesty will help prevent you from committing these acts inadvertently and will strengthen your communication. Plagiarism is a serious legal and ethical breach, and it is treated as such by the university. If you have any questions about documentation, see me before you turn in an assignment.

Computer Ethics

Please check the *Student's Guide: English 150 and 250* for information on the university's computer ethics policy. You are expected to use the university computers responsibly and to communicate courteously with others in your class.

Disability Accommodations

If you have a disability and require accommodations, please contact me early in the semester so that your learning needs may be appropriately met. You will need to provide documentation of your disability to the Disability Resources (DR) office, main floor of the Students Services Building, Room 1076.

Syllabus for English 250

BE SURE TO BRING THE TEXTBOOK AND/OR MOODLE ARTICLES TO CLASS ON THE DAYS THEY ARE ASSIGNED. (HINT: Use recycled paper to print articles.)

NOTE: The syllabus is subject to change and may not list all readings and shorter assignments. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to check the Moodle website and/or call a classmate to catch up.

NOTE: Unless otherwise noted, items **marked in bold**, are to be completed outside of class and are due at the beginning of the class period.

SCHEDULE	IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES	DUE FOR CLASS TODAY
WEEK 1		
Tues 8/21	Introduction to English 250 Discuss critical thinking and identity	
Thurs 8/23 Lab Day	Introduce Assignment #1 – Summary Moodle (course website) intro and sign-on Course policies awareness forms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read <i>EAA</i> Chapter 1 “Everything is an Argument” pp. 1-35 • Review Student Guide for English 150-250, esp. evaluation criteria section
WEEK 2		
Tues 8/28	Social Identity Profile Worksheet and Theoretical Frameworks In-class exercises on reading various types of texts and summarizing for different purposes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring copies of “Social Identity Profile Worksheet” and “Theoretical Frameworks” (Moodle) • Read Wil Wheaton’s blog on Schwarzenegger sci-fi films (Moodle)
Thurs 8/30 Lab Day	In-class exercise on summarizing Review formal emailing conventions Moodle review and sign-on for new students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read “Writing a Summary” (Moodle) • Read “What Did You Expect” by Dorothy Allison (Moodle)
WEEK 3		
Tues 9/4	Intro to Assign #2: Documented Essay Intro to Assign #3 Group Oral Presentations Assign groups for Assignments #2 – 3 Toulmin Model of Argumentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read <i>EAA</i> Chapter 7 “Structuring Arguments” pp.170-206 • Read Duggar’s “Four Modes of Inequality” pp. 21-33 (Moodle)

Thurs 9/6 Lab Day	Intro to Annotated Bibliography for #2 Group brainstorming activity to generate issues for Assns. #2 – 3	#1 – SUMMARY DUE • Read “Good Group Dynamics” and “Brainstorming Techniques” (Moodle)
WEEK 4		
Tues 9/11	Using Sources - PowerPoint and in-class activity: effective use of evidence, bibliographies, and in-text citation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Chapter 16 “What Counts as Evidence” <i>EAA</i> pp. 493-514 • Read <i>EAA</i> Chapter 19 “Evaluating and Using Sources” pp. 549-564 • Read Chapter 20 “Documenting Sources” <i>EAA</i> pp.566-598 • Skim Sample Research Paper and bring copy to class (Moodle)
Thurs 9/13 Lab Day	Research day. Class will meet in the Parks Library lobby.	Bring assignment sheet and group notes to library
WEEK5		
Tues 9/18	Activity on framing arguments In-class exercise on logical fallacies	Read Lakoff Framing and Framing Wars articles (Moodle) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Chapter 15 “Presenting Arguments” <i>EAA</i> pp. 466-489 • Read Chapter 17 “Fallacies of Argument” <i>EAA</i> pp. 515-535
Thurs 9/20 Lab Day	Activity on generating a thesis	Annotated bibliography of at least 4 sources DUE
WEEK 6		
Tues 9/25	Thesis revision exercise	Typed copy of individual working thesis DUE
Thurs 9/27 Lab Day	View documentaries “King Corn” and “The Future of Food” to look for language and bias in factual information	• Bring a copy of Lazere’s “Semantic Calculator” (Moodle)
WEEK 7		
Tues 10/2	Peer review of Documented Essay #2 Sign-up for presentations and discuss group evaluations	Bring draft of Documented Essay #2
Thurs 10/4 Lab Day	Presentations	#3 GROUP PRESENTATIONS
WEEK 8		
Tues 10/9	Presentations, con’t.	#3 GROUP PRESENTATIONS #2 DOCUMENTED ESSAY DUE
Thurs 10/11 Lab Day	Midterm Exam	You may bring your <i>Pocket Style Manual</i> (or equivalent text) to use during the exam.

WEEK 9		
Tues 10/16	Introduce Assignment #4 PowerPoint and in-class activity on rhetorical analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Chapter 5 “Rhetorical Analysis” <i>EAA</i> pp. 95-130 • Read Online Summary Guide (Moodle) • Read synopsis/review handouts (Moodle) • Read Glossary of Rhetorical Terms (Moodle)
Thurs 10/18 Lab Day	Activity on Starr essay	Sign-up for individual conference time on Moodle <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Starr “The Real Declaration” (Moodle) Assignment #4 Email Proposal DUE Thurs 10/18 by 11:59 p.m.
WEEK 10 – Last day to drop classes is Fri, Oct. 26		
Tues 10/23	NO CLASS – INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCES	Typed thesis statements DUE during individual conference
Thurs 10/25 Lab Day	NO CLASS – INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCES	Typed thesis statements DUE during individual conference
WEEK 11		
Tues 10/30	Constructing an analysis: walkthrough of television “minisode”	
Thurs 11/1 Lab Day	Activity on Seigel essay Activity on styles of argument	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read “Reality in America” Seigel (Moodle) • Read Chapter 13 “Style in Argument” <i>EAA</i> pp.417-440
WEEK 12		
Tues 11/6	Peer Review of Assignment #4 Intro to Assignment #5: Visual Argument PowerPoint on Visual Rhetoric	Bring draft of #4 for peer review <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Chapter 14 “Visual Arguments” <i>EAA</i> pp. 411-440
Thurs 11/8 Lab Day	Watch “The Merchants of Cool”	Bring media response worksheet Assignment #4 DUE
WEEK 13		
Tues 11/13	In-class activity: Creating an ad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read “How to Advertise a Dangerous Product” by James Twitchell • Read “Skymall: Pie in the Sky” Bill McKibben on Moodle
Thurs 11/15 Lab Day	Monument rationale activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read “Between Art and Architecture” by Maya Lin on Moodle

WEEK 14 – THANKSGIVING BREAK—NOVEMBER 19-23		
WEEK 15		
Tues 11/27	Introduce Assignment #6: Final Portfolio Peer Review of #5 Visual Argument	Bring files/draft of # 5
Thurs 11/29 Lab Day	Informal presentations of #5 Visual Argument	#5 VISUAL ARGUMENT DUE
WEEK 16 – DEAD WEEK		
Tues 12/4	Revision exercise	Bring a hard copy of Assignment #4
Thurs 12/6 Lab Day	Wrap up activity Course Evaluations	
WEEK 17 – FINALS WEEK (AS SCHEDULED BY ISU)		
SECT. HK	Mon., Dec. 10, 12:00-2:00	FINAL PORTFOLIO DUE
SECT. HM	Fri., Dec. 14, 12:00-2:00	FINAL PORTFOLIO DUE

Course Policies for English 205

Critical Analysis of Popular Culture**Instructor:** Dawn Eyestone**Email:** eyestone@iastate.edu**Office:** 457 Ross**Office Hours:** MW 11-2**Moodle Website:** <http://courses.isucomm.iastate.edu/>**Course Overview**

This course is intended to be an upper level undergraduate course that critically examines various media from popular culture while considering how pop culture helps to formulate our ideas of how identity is formed and maintained. This course will challenge students to examine a variety of media genres within popular culture with a critical eye. We will concentrate our analyses on how pop culture shapes our understanding of how we see ourselves and the world around us, especially as it relates to how we form identities within society.

The course will ask students to critically examine film, television, advertising, the internet, and other media as well as provide students opportunities to analyze and discuss their ideas about identity and culture.

Students will enhance their rhetorical skills by producing analyses in multiple media using ISUComm's WOVE model to provide a rich media experience. Students will work individually and in collaboration with classmates on a variety of shorter and longer assignments in and out of class. Much of the in-class time will be devoted to viewing and analyzing media and discussion of critical issues from a variety of theoretical perspectives.

Required Texts

Gauntlett, David. *Media Gender and Identity, An Introduction, 2nd Ed.* New York: Routledge, 2008.

In addition to the required text, the course website (Moodle) contains supplemental readings and links as well as all worksheets, handouts, and relevant course documents. All due dates for reading, viewing, and assignments are listed on the syllabus.

Course website link: <http://courses.isucomm.iastate.edu/>

Major Assignments and Grading Breakdown

Students will be evaluated on the following coursework:

1. Archetype Analysis Paper (Individual Paper) (15%)
2. Rhetorical Analysis of a Television Show (Individual Paper) (20%)

3. Midterm Exam (Individual In-Class Exam) (15%)
4. Re-Telling a Story (Group Presentation and Rationale) (25%)
5. Final Essay Exam (Individual Take-Home Exam) (15%)
6. Quizzes, Minor Assignments, and In-Class Participation (10%)

Course Policies

Assignments

All work completed outside of class should be typed. Make sure you have a backup copy of all work before you turn it in to be graded. **Major essays will be penalized one grade (e.g., from B to B-) for each class period they are late.** There will be no extra credit assignments. Make sure to keep all of your finished assignments.

Class Attendance and Participation

Classes are in a discussion/workshop format; therefore, regular attendance and active, productive, and courteous participation with classmates and the instructor are important.

- **Missing more than four classes will lower your final grade in the course, and excessive absences (more than eight) will result in a failing grade for the course.** *Emergencies and major illnesses will be evaluated on a case by case basis; however, even with a valid reason to miss, you may have so many absences in a semester that your work and classroom experience are too compromised for you to remain in the class.*
- If you are more than 15 minutes late to class, you will be counted absent.
- Missing during group work means taking a zero for that activity, as group activities cannot be made up individually. Minor in-class assignments cannot be made up but some can be scheduled in advance; if you know you are going to be absent check to see if this is an option.

Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism is a serious legal and ethical breach, and it is treated as such by the university. If you have any questions about plagiarism or source documentation, see me before you turn in an assignment.

Disability Accommodations

If you have a disability and require accommodations, please contact me early in the semester so that your learning needs may be appropriately met. You will need to provide documentation of your disability to Student Disability Resources. The website has additional information: <http://www.dso.iastate.edu/dr/>

Syllabus for English 250

Required Texts: *Media Gender and Identity, An Introduction (MGI)*; additional materials on Moodle

This schedule is subject to change. All readings and handouts are available on the course website. Students are expected to read all posted materials listed for class that day and bring handouts and worksheets to class.

SCHEDULE	IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES	DUE FOR CLASS TODAY
WEEK 1		
Mon 8/22	Course Intro – Welcome to English 205 Popular Culture Analysis	
Wed 8/24	Logging on to the Moodle Intro/Review of Rhetoric and Analysis Internet Memes	“Popular Culture: Resources for Critical Analysis” read main page and browse links (Moodle) Analysis reading (Moodle) Know Your Meme (Moodle)
Fri 8/26	Why Media and Identity?	Read Chapter 1 (<i>MGI</i>) pp. 1-21
WEEK 2		
Mon 8/29	Intro to Assignment 1 - Archetypes What are archetypes and tropes?	“Seven Classic Movie Archetypes” (Moodle) Archetypes handout (Moodle) TV Tropes website (Moodle) Make a Meme (Bring to class)
Wed 8/31	View excerpt of film “Red Heat” for presentations of archetypes – heroes, villains, sidekicks, and getting the girl	Bring media response worksheet - DUE at end of period Read Chapter 2 (<i>MGI</i>) pp. 22-45
Fri 9/2	Continue discussion, exercises on archetypes – monsters, aliens, vampires, and what it means to be “different.”	O. Butler essay “The Monophobic Response” (Moodle) “Queer Reading of X-Files” web article – (Moodle)

WEEK 3		
Mon 9/5	UNIVERSITY HOLIDAY	NO CLASS
Wed 9/7	Small group exercise on character analysis using assigned film	Watch <i>Last Action Hero</i> over the weekend and fill out media response worksheet: DUE in class
Fri 9/9	Discussion of TJ Hooker “minisode” In-class analysis using Bechdel Test	Bechdel Movie Test site and read film analyses ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE
WEEK 4		
Mon 9/12	Intro to Assignment 2	
Wed 9/14	Watch TV “mini-sode” and discuss applying theoretical frameworks	Review theoretical frameworks handout
Fri 9/16	Watch “The Merchants of Cool”	Bring media response worksheet - DUE at end of period
WEEK 5		
Mon 9/19	Critical Analysis PowerPoint Analysis walkthrough of “mini-sode”	View TV show for Assn. 2 over the weekend.
Wed 9/21	Discuss <i>Will & Grace</i> reading	Read <i>Will & Grace</i> article from Moodle ASSIGN. 2 PROPOSAL email DUE by 11:59 pm Wed.
Fri 9/23	Discuss Erving Goffman’s “Gender Advertisements” and website In-class ad analysis	Read Ch. 3 & Ch. 4 (<i>MGI</i>) pp. 47-98 Browse “How to Read Ads”
WEEK 6		
Mon 9/26	Modernity and Postmodernism	Read Ch. 5 (<i>MGI</i>) pp. 99-124
Wed 9/28	Feminisms and Queer Theory	ASSIGNMENT 2 THESIS DUE Read Ch. 7 (<i>MGI</i>) pp.145-163
Fri 9/30	How media shapes language and culture Workshop thesis statements	Read Lakoff Framing Article and NY Times “Framing Wars”
WEEK 7		
Mon 10/3	View documentary <i>King Corn</i>	Bring a copy of Lazere’s “Semantic Calculator”
Wed 10/5	Finish viewing <i>King Corn</i>	Bring in-progress copy of Lazere’s “Semantic Calculator” DUE at end of period
Fri 10/7	Review for midterm exam Writing workshop for Assign. 2	Bring draft of Assign. 2

WEEK 8		
Mon 10/10	Midterm Exam	Bring any notes you desire
Wed 10/12	View film <i>Mickey Mouse Monopoly</i>	Bring media response worksheet - DUE at end of next period
Fri 10/14 *midterm grades due	Finish film <i>Mickey Mouse Monopoly</i>	Bring media response worksheet in progress - DUE at end of period ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE
WEEK 9		
Mon 10/17	Intro to Assignment 3 Groups assigned Watch <u>Xena</u> clip and discuss retelling stories	Read "Gruesome Origins of Fairy Tales" web article
Wed 10/19	Discuss critically retelling a story – <i>Jane Eyre</i> example	Read four Wikipedia entries linked on Moodle
Fri 10/21	Writing workshop: rationales and memo-reports Discuss expectations for conferences	Read "Tips for Rationales" and "Memo-Report Example" on Moodle
WEEK 10		
Mon 10/24	CLASS CANCELLED FOR INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCES	Worksheet DUE during individual conference (on Moodle.)
Wed 10/26	CLASS CANCELLED FOR INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCES	Worksheet DUE during individual conference (on Moodle.)
Fri 10/28 *last day to drop classes	CLASS CANCELLED FOR INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCES	Worksheet DUE during individual conference (on Moodle.)
WEEK 11		
Mon 10/31	Begin film <i>A Thousand Acres</i>	Bring media response worksheet
Wed 11/2	Finish film <i>A Thousand Acres</i>	Bring media response worksheet in progress
Fri 11/4	In-class exercise on retelling Homer's <i>Odyssey</i>	Read "The Penelopean"
WEEK 12		
Mon 11/7	In-class exercise on assigned reading	Moodle reading TBA (check Moodle for update) ASSIGNMENT 3 SCRIPTS DUE

Wed 11/9	Writing workshop: giving presentations	Read "Oral and Multimedia Presentations" PDF on Moodle (from <u>Everything's an Argument</u> pp. 468-86)
Fri 11/11	Group presentations of Assign. 3	BEGIN PRESENTATIONS
WEEK 13		
Mon 11/14	Group presentations of Assign. 3	PRESENTATIONS, CON'T
Wed 11/16	Group presentations of Assign. 3	PRESENTATIONS, CON'T
Fri 11/18	Group presentations of Assign.3	PRESENTATIONS, CON'T ASSIGNMENT 3 RATIONALES DUE
WEEK 14		
11/21-25	THANKSGIVING BREAK	EAT TURKEY AND SLEEP!
WEEK 15		
Mon 11/28	Introduce Final Essay Exam Discuss strategies and ideas for exam	Bring pumpkin pie leftovers to share with class...mmm....pie.
Wed 11/30	Writing workshop: take-home essay	Bring notes/ideas for take-home essay
Fri 12/2	End of semester wrap-up activity Course Evaluations	Bring artifact for discussion
WEEK 16 - Dead Week		
Mon 12/5	Begin film <i>The Celluloid Closet</i>	Bring media response worksheet
Wed 12/7	Finish film <i>The Celluloid Closet</i>	Bring media response worksheet
Fri 12/9	Workshop time for final essay	Bring draft and notes for final
WEEK 17 - Finals Week (Tentative exam schedule; subject to change by university)		
Monday, Dec. 12 12:00-2:00	We will meet during the scheduled final exam period in our regular classroom to discuss essays.	Final Take-Home Essay Exam DUE